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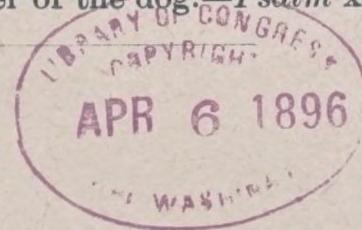
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THE
POWER OF THE DOG

BY
ROWLAND GREY

*Author of "The Story of Chris," "In Sunny Switzerland,"
"By Virtue of His Office," "Linden Blumen,"
"Jacob's Letters," etc.*

"Deliver my soul from the sword: my darling
from the power of the dog.—*Psalm xxii.*



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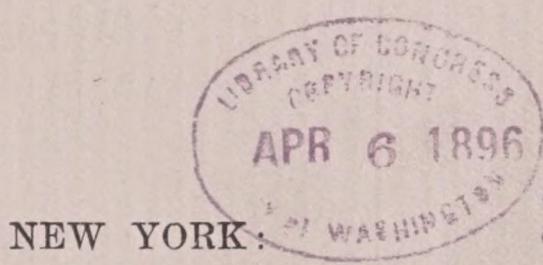
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THE POWER OF THE DOG.

CHAPTER I.

MAN AND WIFE.

 SUNNY June afternoon in an ideal English garden. It was not too hot for a chorus of birds to be singing their hearts out to the murmurous accompaniment of an orchestra of humming insects. A sky like that of Italy itself, only that the depths of tender blue seemed nearer. The thick foliage of the surrounding trees was at that exquisite moment, between late spring and full summer, before the thousand delicate shades have become merged into one prevailing tone of luxuriant verdure.

Allaronde was quite a modern house, for all its picturesqueness. But Nature had planted the garden and had made it beautiful for her own pleasure, generations before a successful man had chosen the copse for a building site. Near the house there were close-trimmed lawns and carpet bedding. There were also

long borders gay with poppies, columbines, tall iris, and countless other flowers. The rose banks were glorious with gold, and crimson, and shell-pink blossoms. Tall syringas, massed with fast-falling bloom, stood up ivory-pale, filling the air with dreamy fragrance.

Only a little distance beyond, and Nature reasserted herself in a bosky woodland half-paved with pine-needles. There the bracken that had newly uncurled its tight brown whorls made an incomparable background for the graceful foxgloves, all the statelier for the shade. The syringa itself was not sweeter than the honeysuckles flinging their luxuriant masses round the tree-trunks. That there are many gardens such as this in England is enough to keep us patriotic. They have an appealing charm that is peculiarly their own, and which is unique.

It did not much matter now how Arthur Farrant's grandfather had become wealthy enough to leave his son a large fortune. Except quite in the country, where the county still holds an enfeebled sway, questions of this kind are not asked as they once were. Two generations of education and idleness left him a satisfactory example of an English gentleman. In the rapid present day it is a long time.

His mother had died when he was born; but she had been a lady and a beauty, and had left him an

inheritance of many good qualities. Shortly afterward his father died also.

At twenty-four Arthur Farrant seemed sufficiently enviable. Rich, young, and handsome, he still lived in Allaronde, his father's house, where, within fourteen miles of the London of which in his own way he was fond, he might live the country life he liked best. He planned for the coming years as we all do till fate intervenes to show us we are powerless.

Three years later he met Philippa Fane. His was one of those natures which are slow to move, but the quiet yet intense passion for this woman speedily altered the whole course of his life. Tired of poverty, Philippa accepted him, finding a certain relief in his very tranquillity from her own stormy emotions. She was judged hardly by the men she had hurt and the women she had outrivaled. That she should love Arthur Farrant those who knew her best pronounced to be impossible. It was said pretty openly that she would throw him over in a moment if better things offered.

She soon had a chance of proving that she was not quite what people thought her. A few weeks before the marriage an accident in the hunting-field condemned the active man of movement to be an invalid for the rest of his days. He might live for years, but he would never stand again.

Philippa was not heartless, though she did not love him. When the news came, with a few pencilled lines, in which the heart-break showed through the words he strove to make resigned, a new sensation made her imagine that the love, the reality of which she had doubted, had come to her. She too was an orphan, eating the bitter bread of dependence on uncongenial relations, in spite of her long line of ancestors, her magnificent figure, her dark eyes, her brilliant intellect.

She asked no counsel in her emergency; there was no wise voice to whisper to her that in obeying a noble-seeming impulse she might be ruining two lives. She acted after reflection that was almost momentary. She hastened to the side of the man who, for the first time in his careless days, was praying blindly for help, and, with a sense of exaltation and triumph that surprised herself, she married him.

He was slow to consent to this sacrifice of her youth, but she argued that she was alone and hated the life she led, and, in the belief that he would not be with her long to hamper her, he yielded to the temptation. He was blamed severely enough, but he had never particularly troubled himself as to the opinion of Society. It was probably one of the reasons why he had been happy. There is nothing more blighting than to take as a watchword for conduct

the question, "What will the world think?" It is so apt to arrive at entirely erroneous conclusions.

They had not been altogether unhappy through the five years the curious union had lasted. Philippa had born a brave face to the world. If she was disappointed, disillusioned, she did not show it. If the Arthur who seemed almost content with his helplessness was different from the pale bridegroom of their solemn wedding, she did not repine. Sometimes she almost doubted if the placid, uncomplaining invalid really loved her very deeply, after all. He understood her so little, was so absorbed in pursuits of his own, pursuits that seemed in her eyes meanly trivial.

She did not love him, or, with love's quick intuition, she would have understood that beneath his outward cheerfulness there were terrible moments. To watch her ride away down the avenue, and to think that he should never again know the delights of a run across country on a soft morning when the scent lay thick; to hear the guns disturbing the crisp October stillness, and to stifle his longing for the sports in which he had once excelled,—all this was a torture that he bore with a silence that had its heroism. She did her duty. Her absences from home, though frequent, were brief, and she was loyal absent as well as present. Of the many who had flirted

with Philippa Fane, not one could boast the slightest favor from the cold, stately Mrs. Farrant.

On the whole, Arthur was not unhappy. There were alleviations. To-day his wheeled couch was drawn under a great cedar, and he was propped up on his pillows, a cigar in his mouth, and in his hands a pack of cards. A thoroughbred fox-terrier lay stretched beside him on the grass, waking from time to time to demand a readily granted caress from his master. Arthur Farrant was very fond of cards. They whiled away some of his dullest hours, and when he had no friend at hand he could amuse himself with patience problems. The strongly built young man, with his big, idle, white hands, his splendid frame, was powerless, as dependent on his servant as an infant.

There was pathos in the picture, perhaps all the more that there was no repining, no ill temper, in the handsome face. Yet Philippa had noted it disdainfully. Smoke in this flower-scented air! Cards when the pageant of summer was moving slowly past with every rustle of the fresh leaves, with every sleepy note of the cooing wood-pigeons! Why did Arthur never read, never think, never seem troubled by the doubts and perplexities that haunted her?

She did not see how miserable he would have been had he done so, or realize how unbearable he might

have made her existence. She only wanted from him the sort of intellectual sympathy he could not give, and which it was infinitely more wholesome for her to be denied.

He had not noticed that she was passing down a path toward the wood that was her favorite walk, but she had stood watching him unseen, and had noted a little incident that came back to her with curious clearness afterward.

One of the cards slipped down on the ground. Ordinarily she would have come forward and picked it up, but to-day she was in one of her moods of impatience with her husband. At times she was indignant with his very resignation. "Hi! Masher, fetch it, good boy," she heard him say cheerfully. The little dog trotted off obediently; but when he jumped upon his master's lap, the queen of hearts was a mangled scrap of cardboard. Masher's sudden spring sent the rest of the pack flying. The average man would have been put out, but not so Arthur Farrant. He began placidly to play with the malefactor, and to put him through some of the many tricks he had taught him.

Philippa hurried away into the wood with a sense of distaste and weariness she did not even try to repress. Her inner life was not shared by any confidential friend. It was absolutely her own, and

latterly she had fostered the dangerous habit of perpetual self-questioning and analysis. It is generally a bad sign when we love no company so well as our own. Philippa Farrant, in her wealth, her stately beauty, and her mental solitude, stood on the edge of an abyss of danger. She had no special interests, no warm affections, to compete with the self with which she was forever taking counsel.

There were those who praised Mrs. Farrant as a model wife; her most determined detractor could not accuse her of any failure in her duty to her husband. There were occasional moments when conscience told another and a variant story. She knew that it was the letter, not the spirit of the law that she mechanically fulfilled. She looked back as to a stranger at the Philippa Fane who for a moment had dreamt of a life of self-oblation and noble devotion to the man who loved her. She was reluctantly conscious that the better impulses of her girlhood came but seldom now. She gave money when she was asked; never otherwise. She had no sympathy with, no knowledge of, the actual poor close at hand, although she had a rather warm theoretical pity for suffering humanity. She would not have hurt her horses or the splendid tawny collie following her leisurely along the pine-scented path; yet there were times when, by a careless word, she made her husband wince

cruelly, and as he never betrayed his pain, she scorned him secretly for bluntness of perception. His character was beyond her power to read.

On this June afternoon she said to herself fretfully that fate had been unjust. She had not tasted the best of life. Of what use were her youth, her beauty, her talents? If she could have painted, or written, or made music, and become famous, she would have been happy, she imagined. She had that true feeling for, and comprehension of, art in a multitude of forms, combined, as it occasionally is, with an odd executive ineptitude. She, who could stand before a Raphael and experience such sensations of delight as fall to the lot of very few, could not make a simple sketch. She had even tried to write verses, and failed in a manner that made her hot to recall it; though why all the world should use prentice hands for the most difficult of the arts is a mystery. She thought she loved literature, yet, unconfessedly, found her chief delight with its Amiels and Marie Bashkirtseffs. She had not much sense of humor, and one of the things that most frequently provoked her with Arthur was his appreciation of little jokes. To stately Philippa genuine fun was a thing well-nigh abhorrent. The subtleties of cynical wit rejoiced her; for honest laughter she cared little.

She now flung herself down in a naturally easy

and graceful attitude, upon the short, thymy grass growing in an open glade, and gave herself up to unprofitable dreaming. She wanted to be free, free—that, she supposed, was really the truth and conclusion of the whole matter. It is strange to note the moral effect of a euphonious sentence. Even alone with her heart, Philippa Farrant would not have cared to own that she wished her husband dead. Yet she could desire to be free, well knowing the one way by which that freedom could be decorously accomplished.

Her meditations were one long tissue of discontent. Everything was flat, stale, and unprofitable. The wood-pigeons cooing sleepily, the murmuring insects, these found deep delight in the warm summer-time. Why could she not re-awaken that joy in mere life that had overwhelmed her in the days of her early youth? She would not now remember that those exquisite moments had been set like water-springs in a desert of dull days. Mere freedom looked so enticing in retrospect that she forgot the rest. As she sat upon the short, velvety turf, with a long spray of honeysuckle in her hand, she might have been an embodiment of June herself. The plain, soft muslin dress showed the curves of her round, graceful figure; the great white hat shaded cheeks flushed like the rich roses she was wearing.

Hers was no longer the charm of extreme youth, but that more dangerous seduction of ripe maturity.

All at once a voice, louder and shriller than the wood-pigeons', startled the lazy air. A thin, high, childish treble sounded clearly from the narrow lane that ran below the palings of Allaronde. Children passed that way often enough, and sometimes sang with a distressing Middlesex accent, but never before had the birds been frightened by the words that hush the Provençal babies to sleep:

“Mes souliers sont rouges,
Ma mie, ma mignonne.”

The refrain was repeated two or three times with such increased emphasis that it roused Philippa to curiosity. There was a hole in the thick screen of trees through which she could peep.

A young man and a fantastically dressed little girl were walking along the white, dusty road. He was tall and slight, with a pale face and dark, short, pointed beard, and though dressed rather carelessly in a shabby light suit, his ease and grace of bearing gave him distinction. There was a touch of foreignness apparent even more in the child, who skipped and danced along as if her slim form had no weight in it at all. The man looked tired and abstracted.

At last the singer stopped abruptly. “Carry me,

papa. I'm tired. And please listen to my new song." In another moment the yellow frock was whirled upon a strong shoulder, and two little slender arms were tightly clasped round the father's neck. Then again rose the song, more triumphantly than ever:

"Mes souliers sont rouges,
Ma mie, ma mignonne,"

and the great dog awoke and growled gently as the voice and the footsteps died away.

Philippa was not, as a rule, curious. She had seen too much of Society to greet fresh people with any kind of pleasurable anticipation. She was so thoroughly accustomed to be bored that she scarcely cared to trouble herself to perform the social duties Arthur liked to have hospitably and punctually fulfilled. But there was an unusualness about this pair of wayfarers that interested her, and made her remember that yesterday, when her pet aversion, the vicar's wife, had paid one of her frequent calls, she had told them that a ruinous but picturesque old house called Lettice Close had just been taken by a young artist and his family.

"As a clergyman's wife, I shall be obliged to call at once," Mrs. Millington had said at parting; "but I hear this Mr. Adrian Sarel had a French mother, so I shall be very careful. With foreigners, one

never knows.” Philippa had let her ripple on with her rapid, rather staccato voice, without paying her much attention, but now she remembered a conversation that had then appeared futile enough. She could not settle down, either to her thoughts or to the books she had brought with her as an excuse for idle dreaming. She strolled about restlessly, gathering a careless posy of tall foxgloves and grasses, with some of the opal dog-roses that flowered abundantly wherever the sun reached them.

At last she retraced her steps slowly by the same path. The chair was still under the cedar tree, but there were sounds of cheerful voices, and a young man sat beside her husband. She went indoors, and stood a moment in the broad, cool hall before ringing the bell.

“Dr. Buchanan is here, ma’am,” the respectful butler volunteered as he answered her summons and offered her a letter.

“Then take tea out at once.”

She opened her letter with very little interest or curiosity. It was written in a formal, clerkly hand, and looked like a bill. Yet, after reading the few lines it contained, she turned very pale and clung to the back of one of the heavy oak chairs for support. The contingency that had seemed impossible in her impatient girlhood had happened, and Philippa Far-

rant, by the death of an unknown relative without nearer heirs, had come into the possession of something like three thousand a year.

"Too late!" The words fell from her lips aloud. Why had she married Arthur? Why had she not waited? Why had she allowed her mad impulse to be her guide, prompted as it had been partly—nay, now she almost believed wholly—by her weariness of poverty? Here, in the splendid house he had given her—given her, as she knew, absolutely by his will—she rebelled wildly against the tie that bound her. Oh, she longed to leave all this quiet luxury, this dull, comfortable monotony. She would like to go away, to see new worlds, to forget her unattractive past. In a few moments a storm of such intensity had raged in her heart at her own impotence that it seemed to leave her years older.

"Tea is served," said the butler suddenly, and, like a true woman, she went calmly out and greeted her guest with a smile, just as if all the Furies were not tormenting her soul.

Dr. Harold Buchanan was young, clever, energetic, and good-looking. He had come to Northbent as assistant to a sleepy old practitioner, and in a few months had wrought astonishing changes. His daily visit to Arthur Farrant was one of his pleasures, and was a delight to his patient. He was pop-

ular everywhere, and even fastidious Philippa admitted that he was a good talker. With his acute gray eyes he instantly noted that Mr. Farrant was not quite herself. He saw that the long white hand, with its load of diamonds, trembled a little as she poured out the tea.

But Arthur observed nothing unusual. The color had returned to her cheeks, and he fondly admired her beauty as she sat there with the background of roses and June sky.

"What a Paradise your place is," said the young doctor, eating strawberries with boyish enjoyment, "after a long round of stuffy cottages, smelling of cooking."

"Don't," said Philippa, interrupting him. "It is a sin to think of unpleasant things on such a day."

"Granted; but, you see, it is only the lucky few who have a chance of forgetting them," said the doctor, filling Farrant's plate with a fresh supply of fruit.

"Buchanan has been telling me that the new people who have taken Lettice Close are likely to be acquisitions," said Arthur, with the unfailing interest in the least scrap of local news that was one of the things which unconfessedly irritated his wife. She thought it undignified of her husband to care to hear exactly how Harold Buchanan's patients were get-

ting on. What she stigmatized as gossip was her abhorrence. She was not very logical, for she read the Society papers with unfailing regularity, regardless of the fact that, after all, the difference between London and Northbent news was not very essential. She did not realize how much unostentatious charity came of those talks with Harold Buchanan, or how much the young doctor's wholesome nature did to keep Arthur cheerful. She fell into the absurd error of always judging other people from her own standpoint, instead of mentally putting herself in their position before doing so.

"New people in Northbent are always charming until they are found out to be exactly like their predecessors. If they are poor, they are discontented; if they are rich, they are dull."

Harold Buchanan looked at Philippa searchingly for a moment as she said these words. There was a pettishness, or an excitement, in her manner that was new. He had always fancied her languid indifference to be assumed; this assured him of it.

"I know very little, of course, about Mr. and Mrs. Adrian Sarel," he continued; "but I can vouch for it that they are not much like the people who come here as a rule."

"That is a comfort," said Philippa carelessly.

"Why, I am sure we have some very nice neigh-

bors," said Arthur, who was easy to please if people were only good-tempered and sociable.

"To begin with, Mr. Sarel is half French and an artist, and Mrs. Millington has decided we must all be very careful. Foreigners, you know, are not always quite nice," and Buchanan imitated the well-known voice of the would-be autocrat of Northbent. "All the same, I thought him a rather remarkable man. He was brought up as his heir by an uncle who was reputed very wealthy. This de Bresne died, and left his nephew the mere pittance that was all he had not squandered. He had a strong bent for art, and had no alternative but to become a professional artist instead of an amateur, and, having a secure income of nothing a year, married the orphan daughter of a clergyman. She was seventeen and very pretty. That was about ten years ago, and they have two children, a queer little girl with eyes as black as sloes, and a pretty boy of four, who is lame, poor little chap. Oh no, I did not find all this out during my one call. I know a man who knew Sarel in Paris."

"And can he paint?" asked Arthur, with an immediate vision of giving the struggling artist a commission.

"That is a question I find it difficult to answer. First of all, I am no judge. Secondly, the man was

so contemptuous of his own work he almost forced me to share his opinion. Too much of the homely sentimental engraving style of business for me. I should have thought him likely to have had more daring, to have attempted more."

But Philippa had hardly listened to all this. The flush had faded from her cheeks, and she sat silent and evidently absorbed in her own thoughts. She gave her hand to Buchanan carelessly when he rose to go a few minutes later, and sat bathed in the rosy sunset glow without speaking, until his footsteps died away down the hard gravel of the carriage drive. Then she said coldly and slowly, "Arthur, I have something to tell you."

There was a pause, and the handsome invalid smiled as if he would fain have won a look from the eyes that were averted.

"An Eric Davenant, who, it seems, was a relative of mine, has died in Australia. He made a good deal of money there. I have had a letter telling me about it. I inherit it."

There was something in her voice that thrilled her husband with a dull dread. When she had married him, he had worshipped her for her nobility, her womanly tenderness for a poor, helpless log such as he must be until he died. He merely laughed at those who hinted that beautiful Philippa had mar-

ried him for his money. He rated himself and his thousands too lowly to consider this possible. Had he been a millionaire, perhaps it might have been so; but as it was—no. He firmly believed that nothing but love could have dictated such a sacrifice. If at times doubts had depressed his hopeful spirit, he had cheered himself with his blind faith that without love she would not have given herself away. He recalled the letter she had written—the letter that was to be buried with him when he died—all on fire with resolve and tenderness. She had been as ice to all other men, he knew, and yet—

“How much is it, dearest?” he asked quietly.

“Three thousand a year.”

Still the same cold voice and downcast eyes. He could not kiss her, could not clasp her in his arms. He could not by any tangible means assure himself that this fair woman was the wife who had sworn tearfully to cherish him “in sickness and in health.” A lingering nightingale filled the warm air with melody; the scent of the syringa and honeysuckle came through it like incense. The minutes dragged by like hours. The moment that had been imminent ever since their hands were joined had come. In a flash of terrible insight the husband Philippa had hitherto only wronged in thought knew all.

"You never loved me. My God, that I were in my grave!"

The low, agonized exclamation broke the spell between them, but still Philippa made no sign. She was not mistress of herself enough to tell the supreme falsehood plausibly, and so she went away and left him alone to realize all the sorrow of the present, the mockery of the past, and the dreariness of the future.

CHAPTER II.

PAINTER, NOT ARTIST.

DURING the momentous hour that changed Arthur Farrant's whole life, although its apparent effect was brief, the new tenant of Lettice Close was loitering about his weedy garden with a listless step, but with a sparkle in his dark eyes that looked like irritation. The cottage was picturesque, but rather ruinous of aspect, and was not improved by the rough addition of a badly-shaped room on the north side, which had been grudgingly added by a landlord who was really glad to get the house off his hands on any terms, but had done so as cheaply and as hideously as possible.

No place that has trees and grass can be ugly in June, but there was something dispiriting in the aspect of the green paths that ought to have been gravel, the roses choked with bindweed, and the rampant growth of groundsel. There was an absence of color displeasing to the artist's eye, and he regretted for the hundredth time the impulse that had led him to yield to his wife's ardent wish to live

in England. His uncle, Parisian though he was, had sent him to school in his father's country, but for various causes he had been much abroad, and he neither looked nor was an Englishman.

He had met Isabel Dale in Switzerland when he was on a sketching tour with some student friends, and she, poor child, was breaking her heart as a governess. At eighteen she had been irresistible in her sweet freshness and simplicity, so, rashly and impudently enough, they had married. She was twenty-eight now, but looked much older. She was cumbered with so many cares and anxieties of a pressing and absorbing nature that she had no time to think of her own appearance, and had almost forgotten the days when Adrian used to spend hours in painting her.

She was honest, good, and conscientious to the heart's core. She loved her husband and her little daughter with a kind of deprecating devotion. Fay was her father's child, with her quick wit, her clever, caustic, unchildlike remarks. But it was her boy who had the first place—little Randolph, whom his father had all unwittingly lamed for life by letting him fall when quite a baby. There had been something wrong ever since, but the mother forgot the defect when she looked at Randie's blue eyes and yellow curls. Adrian Sarel was not a consistent

man. When he had seen how bravely the young mother bore the terrible blow he had inflicted, he had honored and admired his wife as he had never done before. The two-months-old baby was not his rival in her heart, as he had almost thought. She had forgiven him so freely, so immediately, and so fully. But as time went on, he grew more and more proud and fond of the daughter who was so wild and so original.

Randie was quiet, dreamy, and wrapped up in his mother, almost to the exclusion of other affections. He was very timid and silent, and was afraid of his father—why he could not have explained—and that fear kept them asunder. He and Fay were indoors now, having their tea, but down by the neglected strawberry beds a little figure with a big hat and basket was busily gathering up the groundsel, though as yet with very small apparent result.

Adrian Sarel glanced impatiently at his wife, and was almost indignant with the industry he made no attempt to share. He was in very low spirits, though the letter from a leading picture-dealer that he was holding in his hand would have delighted many a better painter than he. It was an order for a replica of a picture he had sent to the Academy and sold, to be paid for at a rate that would have sounded wealth to thrifty Isabel.

"So '*The Little Convalescent*' is a success," muttered Sarel, with a smile that was more cynical than agreeable. "Always my fate. I paint some sentimental trash, and the British public buys and belauds, and the few critics who know anything about art sneer cheaply at my triviality of subject and pettiness of treatment. I slave away for months at something worthy to be called a picture, and it is rejected all round."

"Too big, my dear fellow, for a place where R. A.'s have it all their own way as regards space. Stick to the babies and puppy-dogs that pay and are popular." His advisers had said this to him till he was tired of hearing it.

"And so I must," he concluded, thinking with indolent distaste of the work before him. "A poor man with a wife and family had better get his bread by breaking stones than by painting pictures, if he happens to be burdened with a soul. I hate the whole thing, treated in this way. If I had only money enough, the name of Adrian Sarel might sign something that would live. Artists should not marry. '*There's still Lucrezia*,' even with an Andrea del Sarto, and so he is never a Raphael or a da Vinci. I do not soar as high as he, but if I want to get away from the nineteenth-century prose, I am dragged back by the chains of circumstance. It is

like condemning a novelist to endless paragraph scribbling, or a musician to play Offenbach all his days, when his heart is with Wagner. If I were free, I would never send my one talent to market. If I could do anything else to make an income, I would consent never to touch a brush again. Then I should have a right to dream of what might have been, instead of scorning myself as I do now. But there, if I begin at once, I shall end all the sooner, and Fay can have some new toys when the bill is paid."

"Isabel, Isabel," he called, and his wife looked up from her weeding and came toward him quickly. He was standing under a shady cedar, and it did not occur to him to walk out into the hot sunshine and so spare her the interruption and the glare.

Isabel Sarel was no longer the lovely apple-blossom maiden whose delicate porcelain coloring and china-blue eyes had won her beauty-loving Adrian. She was usually somewhat pale now, and the weeding had made her head ache. Her dress was neat, but ineffective and unpicturesque to the last degree. The masses of fair hair she had once spent so much time in arranging were plaited away simply and tightly. Yet Isabel was a girl still, and would have liked pretty dresses and feminine luxury as well as any one if they had come in her way. Only it took

her all her time to make the children the models of care and good taste they always were, and though Adrian was forever designing frocks that set off the rather peculiar charms of his little daughter, he seldom spoke of or noticed her gowns nowadays, and what did it matter so long as he was satisfied? She was so absorbed in her busy round of household cares that she forgot herself altogether.

There are plenty of women who pass these selfless lives without a thought that there is any injustice in such treatment. Then their husbands encounter brilliant, fascinating ladies in society, and are vaguely discontented that they are not made after this expensive pattern. So they are grumbled at and made willing slaves, until perhaps they vanish into a world that is much fitter for them, and the husbands discover how thanklessly they have been entertaining angels unawares.

To-night Isabel was very tired. The groundsel seemed endless. That terrible period of the quarter would come with the 24th of June, and there were the inevitable bills and so little money to meet them. There were lines on the white forehead under the serviceable but unbecoming straw hat, lines that should not have been there. They deepened as she saw that something had occurred to annoy her husband. She had fallen into the way of not expect-

ing good news, so the surprise was sweet when it came.

"I have just had a letter. 'The Little Convalescent' is sold, and some idiot actually wants a replica—an American, of course," said Adrian, with a bitterness his wife did not notice in her gladness.

The delight that brightened her eyes and brought her peculiarly charming smile to show her dimples, made her as pretty as ever in a moment. Her beauty had not really gone; it would bloom out again with a very little relief from that perpetual, irksome duty of taking such weary thought for the morrow.

"Oh, Adrian, I am so proud of you, and so thankful," she said gratefully, forgetting his look of vexation. "Fancy our boy's dear little face going so far. I said it was the best thing you had ever done, and this proves I am not such a bad judge, after all, as I always think. It is such a comfort to know that the money will come——"

"As usual, just in time to be swallowed up by the bills," interrupted her husband. "Ah, well, I suppose I ought to be satisfied to see the British Matron standing before my work and calling it sweetly pretty, and the successful Chicago pork dealer doling me out a few of his superfluous dollars to give to the baker and the milkman."

The sudden relief from a very present fear had made Isabel too happy to try, as was her rule, at once to fall in with her husband's mood, or to be quite as tactful as usual.

"Never mind, Adrian; the time will come when you will be able to do exactly as you like. It must. Nobody paints better than you do, and when you have done the replica—and it won't take very long—you can rest a bit, or work at something you care about."

"To be rejected, like 'Medea.' Well, Isabel, I'm glad you are so pleased. And, look here, do get yourself a gown. That horrible drab thing makes me hot to look at it."

It gave Isabel a thrill of harmless pleasure to know that Adrian cared to look at her at all. The thought that when the bills were all paid there would be no margin for new dresses, did not destroy her satisfaction in the least. Indeed, she was already planning a green velvet suit with a pale blue sash for Randie, if the funds held out to allow of any luxuries.

"I am going to take the children for a walk after they have had their tea. It has been too warm for Randie all day. Will you come too? It would be quite like old times," she said wistfully.

"No; I must answer the letter before post-time. But I will meet you later if you like." He added

this with a sudden prick of the conscience that now and then reminded him that, seldom as Isabel asked him to do anything, he almost always found an excuse for denying her.

She emptied her big basket of its load, and went into the house. There were sounds of laughter upstairs, and presently she came out again with her two children.

They were a striking pair, certainly. Fay was too thin and brown at present, and tall for her seven years; but her dark, wavy hair hung in thick, undulating masses under her large hat, and a pair of deep, dark eyes looked out bright and fearless from the fringe of curls about them. Her hands and feet were small and well-shaped. In fact, Félice, as she was never called, was her French grandmother, name and type, as little Randolph was his mother over again. The child, in his loose suit of dark blue cotton, used his crutch with a pathetic dexterity that would have struck an outsider painfully. But Isabel was too accustomed to it to torment herself by perpetual contrasts between Fay's elfish lightness of step and her poor little brother's slow progress.

Those who looked at Randie's face forgot his lameness directly. There was a sweet, trustful appeal in it that went straight to the heart. The French bonne the Sarels kept because she was so

much cheaper than a regular nurse worshipped Monsieur Bébé; the village children shyly offered him flowers; and since he had sat beside his mother in church, a good many people found themselves thinking of the angels in such old masters as happened to appeal to their special taste. "Dear lamb," an old woman had said to his mother, "it does me good even to look at him." For the perfect, exquisite innocence, the rare charm of freshness, that most children lose so early, made themselves felt by all who came in contact with the one son of Adrian Sarel.

Isabel was as glad as the children were to-night, and listened to Fay's rapid chatter with even more than usual contentment.

"Where shall we go?" she inquired, as they neared the garden gate.

"We both want to go to the canal," said Fay, who always took the lead. "The forget-me-nots must be out, and I want to pick them."

"I'll pick a *big* bunch, all for you, mummy," said Randie with much satisfaction.

"And we can sit on the grass and make chains with the dog-daisies," put in Fay.

A canal is not like a river, inasmuch as it is artificial instead of natural, but it has the great advantage in a riverless district of being accepted by the

water-mint and willow herb and forget-me-not as an efficient substitute for the genuine article. They grew in tempting profusion all along the grassy canal banks, which were decidedly popular playgrounds with the Northbent babies and their nurses.

But this evening the place was deserted, and the little party sat down in a bed of clover and golden trefoil that made an undergrowth for the tall grasses, rosy sorrel, and daisies that covered the sloping bank above the water. Isabel rested there with a soft expression of entire content in her eyes. With those dreadful bills off her mind, she could enjoy the still, warm air, the flowers, and Randie's joy in the daisy chains she was deftly weaving.

"Chain me tight to you, mummy, so that I can never get away, even when I am quite, quite big," said the child. "I never mean to go away. Fay would like to go ever so far across the sea to Quimper, where Suzanne lives, but I only want to be with you."

What wonder that Isabel should kiss her boy with a very passion of tenderness as she threw the long chain round his neck? He was so loving, so winning; not with uncertain outbursts of demonstrative affection such as Fay showed between her frequent fits of anger, but with an even, perpetual devotion to the one idol of his little heart.

After that short interview with her husband, Philippa Farrant had felt that she must at once get away from Allaronde, if only for an hour. Something must happen after such a scene, but at present she could not reflect calmly, or, indeed, reflect at all, in the place she hated to call home. So she, with her dog Kismet, had gone down the mossy path, unlocking a gate that led to the road, and across a wide meadow to the canal. It was past six and quite cool, but her head throbbed and ached feverishly. She felt as if she had committed a crime, and yet she could not regret it. The remembrance of the pain and pallor in her husband's face did not move her from her fixed determination to get out of the groove she was in at all costs.

Yet, if she left Arthur Farrant now, what a finger of scorn the world would be justified in pointing at her! For a penniless woman to marry a rich man, and abandon him because she had inherited a fortune! These were the bald facts. She could not make society understand all the subtleties of the case. Like every woman who has been in a similar or analogous position, she thought her own instance was as unique in all respects as in one it possibly was. Then, she would have to give reasons if she acted definitely. What could she say? What smallest stone could she cast at the husband who had

flung his money at her feet as if it were unworthy of her acceptance? Had she but had the resolution to tell Arthur the truth two or three years ago, what a different position she would have been in.

But now it would reveal so glaringly the true reason of her marriage, which was not quite the truth, after all. There had been that momentary, pure impulse of unselfishness, transient as it had been. She knew it, but was it likely the world would give her even the scanty meed of approval awarded at the time by her own conscience? She had no tangible excuse, no lover to tempt her until her yielding might seem almost forgivable. She had never loved, though she had enjoyed using the power of her own beauty to the utmost. It was a tangled skein to unravel. A decision was inevitable before she and Arthur met again.

She strolled along the top of the bank, and presently caught sight of Isabel Sarel and Randie, both hung with a tangle of daisy chains. She stood watching them idly, and, almost for the first time, wished she too had had children. She was by no means naturally fond of them, but she noticed, like every one else, the beautiful, serene face and the golden halo of curls. Sitting as he was in the long grass, the little crutch was not visible, and his merry laugh rang clear and musical in the lazy summer breeze.

Fay, who was a restless mortal, had soon tired of daisy chains, and had amused herself by blowing away vigorously at the dandelion clocks. She suddenly remembered the forget-me-nots, and walked along lower down to see if she could find any. They did not seem to be very plentiful as yet, but the child managed to reach a few sprays, wetting her thin shoes as she did so.

Her mother forgot her for the time, so she wandered on till she saw the bright blue flowers in tempting profusion, apparently on dry land. "It looks just a bit squashy and soft," she said to herself, "but I expect it will bear me. Papa calls me Featherweight." Just for one instant the little, light figure stood safely upon the pale green leaves and grasses; the next, there was a piercing shriek, and Fay was struggling in the midst of the canal.

Philippa Farrant and Isabel Sarel were side by side by this time. Both heard the agonized scream. Philippa was an accomplished swimmer. Isabel could not swim at all. Pale as death she started up and broke the encumbering daisy chains.

"Mummy, mummy, don't leave me," cried Randie, clinging to her.

For one brief second Isabel hesitated, for she was not a courageous woman. If the man who hesitates is lost, how much more a woman, from whom so

much more is always expected? In that flash the golden opportunity vanished, for Philippa had flung herself into the water, and, with the few easy strokes of a practised swimmer, had seized Fay and was bringing her safely back to land.

It was the most horrible experience of Isabel's whole life. She had let her cowardice make her fail in a supreme duty. She had let a stranger take from her the sweet task of rescuing her child. Better even to have drowned herself than to have so poor a spirit, so pitiful a lack of noble self-oblation. Poor Isabel! A wave of bitterness flooded all her soul. She knew now with relentless certainty that she was not brave, and it was an unutterable humiliation.

She clasped Fay wildly in her arms when they reached the bank, and could not speak to the tall lady who was shaking her wet dress and smiling at her fear.

Adrian had kept his promise to meet his wife. He came toward them a moment later, and, guessing what had happened, bowed low before the woman who had saved his little daughter.

"Papa, papa, I'm not hurt," said Fay, who was terribly frightened and very pale. "I only wanted to pick forget-me-nots, and then, all in a minute, I was in the water, and then——"

"I was luckily close at hand, and brought you out," said Philippa, who had enjoyed the momentary excitement, and liked to see that this handsome man thought her a heroine.

"I cannot *thank* you for such a service. Mere words are useless. My little daughter"—he had taken her from her mother and held her closely—"is the apple of my eye."

"There is a fly going along the road," said Isabel, practical even in the midst of her shame. "It could drive you home, so that you would not take cold."

"I am Mrs. Farrant, of Allaronde; so, you see, I have only just to go across the meadow to be in my own garden. Wet never hurts me. I am as strong as possible." Adrain had signalled the dusty fly, and it stopped. "Well, if I do drive, your little girl must come also. It is almost on your way, if, as I think, you live at Lettice Close."

"Then you must allow me to see you there safely," said Adrian.

Philippa assented, but Isabel held out her hand. "I will walk home across the fields, and see that everything is ready for Fay. Come, Randie. I can never forget what you have done for us so bravely, Mrs. Farrant."

Philippa was in one of her most charming moods as she drove away with her new acquaintance.

After all, she said to herself, she could not be such a very bad woman if she was ready to jump into a canal to rescue a strange child. Adrian expressed his gratitude much more eloquently than an Englishman would have done, and magnified the not very dangerous incident until it assumed heroic proportions. She was happier and better satisfied with herself than she had been for a long time, for a kindly action leaves a warm glow, whatever motive has prompted it.

"Good-by. I shall have the pleasure, I hope, of calling on Mrs. Sarel to-morrow," and, kissing Fay lightly, she went into the hall.

While she was dressing, her maid brought a message to say that her husband had a bad headache and would not dine. It was a relief, for it adjourned the need of an immediate decision.

She thought over her escapade and the actors in the unexpected little drama in which she had played the leading part. She had noticed Isabel's hesitation, momentary though it was, and rather rejoiced in it. Mrs. Sarel must be a poor creature if she was afraid of a cold bath in the canal. Why, that queer, big-eyed girl might have drowned if she had not happened to be there. She decided promptly that this Mrs. Sarel was a very commonplace, dull woman, besides lacking those warm feelings a mother should

have toward her own child. Poor Isabel! She was invariably misjudged, and never more so than in this instance.

At Lettice Close there was an excitement in putting Fay to bed, but Adrian was rather silent at the late supper, and Isabel was quietly asking herself whether she ought to tell her husband of her fear and its result, though she dreaded intensely that he might condemn her as she condemned herself.

He went to the studio after he had been upstairs to kiss the little daughter who was now asleep, and who was the only thing on earth he cared for even half as much as for himself. There was a great canvas turned against the wall. He had not looked at it since the day when it had come back rejected from the Academy. The bare, unluxurious room, with no furniture except the merest necessaries, was flooded with moonlight, and the scent of the monthly roses came in through the open widow.

Adrian took up the picture that had inspired so much hope and ended with such sickening disappointment. He put it upon the easel, and looked at it long and critically. It represented Medea compounding the love-potion that was to win her the heart of Jason. The tall, dark woman, in a yellow robe, with jewels on her bare round arms and in her dusky hair, was standing in a deep wood of cypress

and ilex. The moon shone out, paled and half obscured by the blue smoke that rose thickly from the smouldering fire of logs over which hung the brazier that contained the mystic ingredients. It was not vengeance-demanding Medea, ready to steep her hands in blood to gain her heart's desire; it was not the enchantress, strong in the knowledge of her art, and calling on the invisible spirits to aid her, that Adrian had tried to depict. It was simply a mere woman with a soul convulsed by her first great passion. She had forgotten even her spells for a moment, and was praying to the gods, with her black eyes upraised, as fervently as the simplest girl.

"Women are all alike when they are in love," Adrian had once said, and he had tried to show the proud Princess of Colchis under a new aspect. He had certainly failed to impress the Hanging Committee, but until this moment his faith in his own effort had been unshaken. Now, as he looked at "Medea," he made two discoveries simultaneously. One was that she bore a strong likeness to Mrs. Farrant; the other, that, after all, he had not done much more than paint a pretty woman in a graceful attitude.

Two months ago the last conclusion would have filled him with despair. Now it was the first that principally affected him. He looked at the features

with increasing surprise. The face had not been that of a model. It had smiled at the painter in his own imagination, and had been completed weeks before he had come to Lettice Close.

"Yet, if that picture had been in the Academy, it might have been thought Mrs. Farrant had honored an obscure artist by letting him take advantage of 'a perfect woman, nobly planned.' I should like to paint her; not in a modern gown, all furbelows and frills, though."

He wandered about until he took up an old sketch book. Page after page revealed one face, his wife's, in every pose and every expression.

How she had changed! Or is it merely that one tires even of a beauty one knows too well?

He shut the book abruptly, and went through the low passage to the little drawing-room. Isabel was sitting beside a shaded lamp, busily mending one of Fay's gay little frocks. She had no time for thinking with idle hands, but she had had her mental struggle, and won a victory that left her pale but resolute.

"Do you think I am a coward, Adrian?" she asked, looking up sadly at her tall husband.

"Of course not. Why, you silly child, what put such an idea into your head?"

"I *must* tell you," she burst out with an earnest-

ness that startled him. "When Fay fell into the canal, just for a moment—only a moment—I felt I could not jump into the cold, deep water. Randie held me, and I thought I might be drowned and never see him again. I should not be afraid to die if it were not for leaving him. He would be so desolate without me."

Adrian laughed at her with an affectation of carelessness and incredulity, but he was strangely perplexed by the confession so humbly made. He forgot that the poor in spirit have their own special blessing, and that only the most consistently obeyed conscience could have prompted her to speak. He merely contrasted her weakness with the courage and readiness of the brilliant stranger who had flashed into his life and saved his child.

CHAPTER III.

THE VICARAGE.

HE day that followed the eventful afternoon when Fay Sarel had been rescued from the canal had been anticipated for six weeks with much anxiety by all the girls in Northbent, and by one in particular. The rich new owners of a fine old house in the neighborhood, who had made their money in the City in some undefined way, were to give a ball on a scale of magnificence unparalleled in Northbent annals. Rumor was full of the supper, the ball-room, built splendidly for the occasion, and the special train that was to bring the guests from London. The "Blue Hungarians" were to form the orchestra, and a military band was to play in the intervals in the illuminated rose gardens.

The brilliant sunshine augured well for a fine evening, and Beryl Millington rejoiced exceedingly as she looked out of the window very early to see what the weather was likely to be.

The Reverend Jessop Millington was the Vicar of Northbent. His young wife had been early worn

out by the struggle to bring up seven children on a curate's income, and, after about twelve years' heavy labor, had gone anxiously and sorrowfully to her grave. Almost with her last breath she had advised her grief-stricken husband to marry again; realizing, as he could not realize for himself, how utterly helpless he would be without her, though she shrank from the thought of a step-mother for her three curly-headed sons and four daughters, the eldest of whom was scarcely eleven.

Jessop Millington was a gentleman and a scholar, and he had loved his dead wife tenderly. But her unselfish thoughtfulness had fostered his natural incompetency to take any share in household drudgery, to such a degree that the first year or two following her death had been a purgatory he still shuddered to recall. Then his college had given him the not particularly valuable living of Northbent, and very soon afterward he had married again.

"Been married" expressed the truth better, for Miss Julia Backson had felt that her income permitted her to lay so determined a siege to the good-looking, absent-minded vicar, as to leave him little option in the matter. He met her at a time when he was utterly weary of the miserable position of a widower with a large family of young children, no sisters or near relations to share his responsibility,

and none of that natural aptitude for domestic duties which is as much the prerogative of certain men as of some, but by no means all, women.

She had domineered over her father till she was forty years of age, twenty of which years had been spent in tireless effort to change her name. When old Mr. Backson had left the tea trade for ever, she had tried harder still, and succeeded. She was not in the least like gentle Alice Coventry, but she kept house in a systematic fashion, and, as she was forever repeating, tried to do her duty to the seven children who called her "mamma" because that other name was sacred to an angelic being, all love and loveliness, of whom their sister Beryl used to tell them stories after they were in bed, or on Sunday afternoons.

Mrs. Millington was a tall, thin, active woman. She was so indefatigable and so restless that it would have been a joy to her acquaintances to have seen her idle for a moment; added to which, she was never sleepy and never had a headache. She had quick, shallow eyes that were always on the watch for the small failings of other people, a sallow complexion, and dark hair that suggested bandoline by its unnatural neatness.

She was not bad-tempered, and she had many good qualities; yet she was the terror of the villagers and

the aversion of the Northbent ladies. It is a pity that people who are really good at heart so often possess the knack of making themselves detested. Her coal and clothing clubs, her mothers' meetings, her needlework society, were models of their kind. She visited her parishioners with clockwork regularity. But she could do nothing without fussy proclamation, and was so profoundly impressed with her own ability, judgment, and good taste as to be in a chronic state of self-satisfaction which was irritating to persons less convinced of their own superiority.

There was, however, one characteristic worse even than this. Mrs. Millington was born a braggart, as other people are born poets or musicians. Everything she possessed—her house, her servants, her furniture, and, above all, her garden—was unique of its kind. Did a caller remark that she was engaged in that quest of forlorn hope, the search for a good cook, she had straightway to hear the whole catalogue of the perfections of the vicarage Sarah, whilst discussing cake that was a local proverb for toughness and heaviness. As to her roses, Allaronde and six gardeners could scarcely match them. The very laurels were so fine that intelligent passers-by had been overheard by her to like them to magnolias.

"If the sea-serpent turns up again, I shouldn't wonder if mamma caught a fine specimen in the pad-

dock pond," Roy Millington had once remarked to his pet sister.

Harold Buchanan took a wicked pleasure in capping Mrs. Millington's endless anecdotes, but even that burning and very apparent desire to secure him as a husband for Beryl, which afforded him much private amusement, and was as yet not even surmised by Beryl herself, did not make her yield an iota of her own supremacy.

Luckily, the Reverend Jessop was too much immersed in his studies to be very observant of his wife's defects. It was Beryl who was keenly and painfully conscious of them, Beryl who was quick-witted enough to rebel against the knowledge that her father's wife was the laughing-stock of Northbent. She was eighteen, pretty with a round, youthful prettiness, and with a short, neat figure. She had only one beauty, a pair of small, dainty feet with high insteps, but it was these feet at which she was looking with much dissatisfaction as she was sitting on the low wall that separated the glebe meadow from the dusty road that led to the station. She was in a shabby, washed-out cotton dress, but, for all that, she was grown up now, for was she not to come out at Mrs. Heywood Bunting's ball this very night?

She could dance really well, and several of the

young fellows she knew had made her very happy by asking her to keep them waltzes. "Just as if I shouldn't be only too thankful to get a partner at all among all those smart people," Beryl had thought gratefully, for, with all her shrewd power of gauging her stepmother, she was very natural and simple, and rated herself lowly enough.

This morning her mind was much perturbed. Her dress was all right. An uncle in India had sent her a piece of embroidered white silk, and she had asserted herself so strongly about the making that Mrs. Millington had finally given in to her wish to have it perfectly plain. She had also spent a great slice of her slender allowance on open-worked white silk stockings; but the shoes—there was the rub.

Beryl did not often go to London, for even third-class fares and omnibuses were apt to mount up, and as Mrs. Millington had yesterday made her quarterly excursion to purchase the family groceries at the stores, to the indignation of the local tradesmen, she had been deputed to buy Beryl's first pair of satin shoes. Beryl was not vain, but she had a harmless satisfaction in the fact that she wore small threes. She had naturally a sense of the fitness of things, and her feelings of indignation were intense when Mrs. Millington, after her late return home, had

opened a parcel and revealed a gaudy mixture of scarlet morocco and patent leather.

Mrs. Millington was utterly devoid of taste in dress. She was rather fond of color, and occasionally indulged in startling contrasts. Her gowns were always too youthful, and she affected short, tight jackets. Her bonnets made Adrian Sarel absolutely wince.

"My dear Beryl," she began rapidly, "I have added another shilling—no, ninepence—to your money because I knew how useful these pretty shoes would be to you. White satin would be dirty in one evening, and if you put some scarlet geraniums in your hair to match, it will brighten up your dress, which, I must say, strikes me as rather plain for such a grand occasion."

Beryl was not at all strong-minded, and it is much to be feared that her eyes were full of tears. She was discussing the knotty point with her second sister, Elizabeth—always curtailed to Betty—who was almost more provoked than the prospective wearer of the articles in question.

Betty was only fourteen, so her time for ball-going was distant. However, she was quite enough of a daughter of Eve to pity her sister profoundly as she sat beside her, swinging to and fro with more freedom than grace.

"I do think mamma is quite the most irritating person I know," Beryl exclaimed pettishly. "I did think, when I had got the dress decently made, it would be all right, and I should pass muster. Nobody expects a clergyman's daughter to be anything but dowdy. I could have borne that, but—"

"You see, Berry, the worst of it is, I don't believe you are very good-looking. I am not quite sure, you know, till I see you all dressed up, but I think not. Now your feet *are* pretty," interrupted Betty, a candid young person who usually spoke first and thought some time afterward, if at all.

"They won't be, in those horrid, vulgar shoes. Mamma's one idea is what she calls nice, bright colors. Did you hear her ask me to put geraniums in my hair, *red* geraniums? She would like to plant me all over like that hideous middle bed on the lawn."

"Oh, Berry, *why* did father marry a woman who could put scarlet and magenta into one border?"

"Why, because he *was* father, and too good-natured not to let her have her own way," retorted Berry with unusual bitterness.

"If I were you," began her sister, with the air of one proposing a desperate remedy, "I should go straight to father now, ask him to give you some money, and go up to London by the 12:10."

"Indeed I won't," answered Beryl. "He would

only look very worried at being disturbed, and say, ‘Of course, my dear. Go to mamma, and she will give you what you want.’ Then mamma would go into the study, and while she was pulling about his papers and tidying up the room—and it drives father wild to have his things tidied—she would tell him how ridiculous it would be to give me ten shillings when I had such a good allowance, and how she had given a whole extra ninepence to get me shoes that would be useful as well as far prettier. No; it is a trial for any girl to go to such a ball in such shoes, but it would be a thousand times worse to have poor dear papa made miserable in this hot weather.”

“I tell you what it is, Berry. You will never get what you want, because you are always so fidgety about making other people uncomfortable. I believe you would rather go barefoot than see father’s bothered look; you know the look I mean.”

Betty always spoke with a clearness of enunciation that made her high-pitched, emphatic voice carry a long distance. Neither she nor Beryl had observed that Dr. Harold Buchanan was walking to the station, and that therefore he had necessarily overheard a good part of the discussion. He liked the vicarage girls, though he stood in such fear of Mrs. Millington that his visits were few and far between.

He was not in love with rosy Beryl. Marriage, he said to himself, was out of the question for him at present, and as he was perfectly heart-whole he absurdly imagined that his resignation was due as much to philosophy as to force of circumstance. His work interested him more than anything else; but though his mind was full of the scientific meeting he had obtained a holiday to attend, he had listened to part of the foregoing dialogue, and smiled to himself.

Harold Buchanan was poor, and could not often allow himself the pleasant luxury of making presents; but, for all that, he was standing in a fashionable shoe-shop in Regent Street an hour later.

"Poor little thing, it was really rather heroic of her to spoil her get-up instead of disturbing her father," he said to himself in excuse for such reckless expenditure. "I don't fancy many girls would have done as much. Now I come to think of it, her feet are really very pretty, and pretty feet are so scarce that they ought to be made the most of."

Dr. Buchanan was not the sort of young man who was accustomed to buying gifts for ladies, and he felt and looked both shy and awkward when the smart shopman came forward.

"I want some white satin shoes," he began nervously, rather bewildered by the variety that were instantly set before him.

"What size, sir?" was the natural but embarrassing question.

There was a momentary silence, during which the doctor devoutly wished he had never embarked on this doubtful enterprise. Then he suddenly caught sight of some shoes on the counter, and felt persuaded that, though small, they might do. They were particularly dainty too, being of white satin, embroidered with tiny flowers in silver thread, with silver heels.

"That size," he answered with an assurance he was far from feeling. "How much are they?"

"Well, sir, they were made to match a wedding dress, and were returned as a misfit, so I would charge you twenty-five shillings." He said this with the air of a man making a great sacrifice.

It was much more than Buchanan had anticipated; but three ladies had just entered the shop, and he felt that his one desire in life was to get away. Give the address he must, because if he directed the parcel himself his writing would be known. So he paid the bill and an extra sum for having the parcel sent down by the next passenger train to Northbent and delivered immediately.

When it came, the Millington family was having tea in the garden rather riotously. It was baby Barbara's eighth birthday, and the feast was held in her

honor. The dull drone of a harmonium came through the dining-room windows. Mrs. Millington was holding her mothers' meeting, and for once was a little late.

They were all there—the two tall boys from Westminster, Roy and Bevan, who were home for an exeat; Betty, extremely untidy and hot after an afternoon in the hayfield, with the twins, Alice and Monty, always together and always in mischief; curly-headed Barbara, as was her right, wearing a crown of wild roses as queen of the day.

"Fancy you a grown-up young lady, Berry," said Roy, who was to go to the ball himself, and was privately a little scared at the prospect.

"I don't believe it will be any jollier at the ball than it is here," said Betty with decision. "You will all be so grand in your smart gowns, and no one can enjoy life unless one has on old clothes."

"It doesn't make any difference to you, Betty. You always ruin a new rig-out in about an hour. Who climbed the paddock fence, just after it had been re-tarred, in her confirmation gown?"

"Well, it was the Sunday after, you know, Bevan, and I think it very ungrateful of you not to remember that I did it to get a Large Tortoise-shell for your collection; yes, I even killed it for you, though you know I hate the killing."

"Never mind, Bet, you are a brick, and Brown Minor said he wished he had you for a sister when it came by post. He said he should like to know a girl capable of feeding his caterpillars when he was away. His sisters must be regular duffers. They gave his Swallowtails cabbage instead of fennel, and they died, after they'd cost him threepence each. But what have you got there, Keziah? Something good to eat, let us hope."

"A parcel for Miss Beryl."

Betty cast one keen glance at the package her sister was curiously opening, and fairly shouted when its contents were revealed. "It's shoes for the ball. Oh, Berry, where did they come from? Who sent them? Are they for you?"

Beryl had turned very pink as she held up the glittering treasures. "They must be for me," she said, almost too overwhelmed for words. "But there is nothing—not a word—to say who they are from, not even the name of the shop," which the wary sender had stipulated was not to be printed on the box.

"Is it a fairy godmother?" asked Bab, who still half believed in the fairies and wholly in Santa Claus.

"They're beauties, anyhow," said Betty. "But, dear me, what bits of things."

"Not much like your canal-boats," said Roy with brotherly candor.

"Oh, very well, Roy," said Betty imperturbably, "I shall say they are too big to run your errands next time."

Beryl's heart sank, but she privately resolved that wear them she must. They were so lovely, and she had never had anything like them before, or, indeed, any finery at all.

"Try them on, Berry," some one suggested, and with much fear and trembling she did so.

They fitted exquisitely, and, unconsciously enough, the girl made a pretty picture, standing beneath the big chestnut, lifting up her scanty skirts as if she were going to emulate more fashionable folk in a *pas seul*.

"They're simply sweet," said Betty, who loved pretty things, though she did not covet them for herself.

Beryl felt as if her cup of happiness had brimmed quite over. "If I only, only could find out who sent them, just to say how utterly delighted I am," she exclaimed ecstatically, for, after all, at eighteen very small things give immense pleasure.

"You never will," announced Betty with decision. "You are a very poor hand at that sort of thing. But I shall."

Just at this juncture the drawing-room window opened, and Mrs. Millington bustled out, provoked to find that for once she was late.

"Alice and Monty, go upstairs and brush your hair at once. Betty, that elbow must be darned, and darned properly, before to-morrow. Beryl, what *are* you doing, and what have you got on your feet?" All this without a pause, in her quickest staccato.

"White satin shoes," said Beryl, taking them off precipitately.

"Am I blind, Beryl?" said Mrs. Millington, putting Barbara's pinafore to rights. "I go up to London in all this hot weather to buy you expensive shoes, and this is what comes of it. You go into debt and disobey me. If I were your father, I should be inclined to forbid your going to the ball at all."

"Ah, but you're all wrong for once," said Betty dauntlessly. "Berry doesn't do such things. They are a present; nobody knows who from. Why, here's the paper they came in."

Mrs. Millington looked scrutinizingly at it, but, naturally enough, was not much enlightened. She liked to have her own way in trifles, and detested any sort of mystery unless she made it herself.

"Now, Beryl," she continued, "tell me at once who had the impertinence to send you the things.

I call it a deliberate insult to your father and to me. Just as if I, at least, had not an income amply sufficient to send you out properly dressed."

"I don't think it can have been meant like that; but, truthfully, mamma, I have no idea where they came from."

"I fink a fairy bringed them," said Bab, who was a backward talker.

"I am glad to have a sister with decent feet," said Roy, who was Beryl's own particular brother and supporter. "I should like to know how many North-bent girls could get on those."

Happily, at this moment a caller was announced, and Beryl was left in peace. Probably, if Harold Buchanan could have known how joyful were her thoughts, his growing curiosity to see his purchase again would have increased.

By nine o'clock the long business of dressing was over, and the girl was trying to see as much of this unfamiliar new self as the small looking-glass in the barely furnished room she shared with Betty would permit. She was no beauty, but essentially good to look at; a freshly colored picture of youth and health, and half-glad, half-shy anticipation.

Betty was ecstatic. "My dear Berry, you do look a darling, and the shoes are simply sweet. I think I was wrong, and that you are pretty, after all."

Beryl rather valued honest Betty's encouragement, that young person being famous for the candor of her criticisms. She was untidier than ever by this time, and the hole in her elbow was bigger than it had been at tea.

"Never mind the old thing till you're all off, anyhow."

"Oh, Betty, isn't it a pity you are not old enough to come too?" exclaimed Beryl, who felt as if her sister would have been a support among all the unfamiliar faces.

Betty laughed. "I'd ever so much rather go out sugaring with Bevan. We mean to go to the plantation and have a regular good time. I'm in no hurry to come out. I don't like company manners. It *is* such a comfort to know mamma will be out of the way."

"Don't be too late, Betty," said Beryl mildly, taking up the posy of white roses and carnations that was none the less pretty because she had made it herself, and going slowly down-stairs.

They were all in the hall, but Bevan was the spokesman. "You look jolly decent," he said with patronizing approval.

"She's like a queen," said little Alice, looking up adoringly at the gentle sister who seemed always to be smiling.

Roy, who was a tall, handsome lad not quite at ease in his new dress suit, dropped his voice reverently, and said, as he wrestled with his gloves, "She is like something better. She is like mother," and then followed the momentary awed pause with which that word was always received in the home where her faithful eldest born kept the memory of the dead so green.

Mrs. Millington had not come down yet. She had too many bows and furbelows to affix to a renovated gown to make her toilet a light matter.

"Do you think I ought to go to father when he is writing his sermon?" questioned Beryl.

"My dear Berry, you are a funny girl," said Betty, tossing back her rough hair. "Just as if any old sermon mattered when you are going to your very first ball, and it's only Friday."

So Beryl went softly into the small, book-lined room whence learned commentaries and sometimes classically turned hymns went out into the world.

Mr. Millington had forgotten even the existence of the ball. He had had a long, wearisome day with the school inspectors, and an even more wearisome conversation with his wife. He had meant to begin his sermon, but instead had fallen asleep in the dusk, the servants, in their excitement, having forgotten to bring in the reading-lamp as usual.

Beryl loved her father with an almost protecting tenderness. His very weakness endeared him to her all the more. She bent over him very softly and kissed him.

He had evidently been dreaming, for the word "Alice" sprang to his lips when he opened his eyes.

Beryl's filled with rising tears in a moment.

"Why, my little Beryl is a woman," said her father, looking at her very tenderly. He was too dreamy to be demonstrative, but the white dress and the roses conjured back a rush of golden recollections. "You are more like her than I knew, my darling," he continued. "Ah, Beryl, if she could have lived to see you. It seems only yesterday that Alice Coventry came to me with roses like those. It is hard that even you must have forgotten her."

It was almost the first time he had ever spoken of his loved and lost, and the girl broke out passionately, "Father, dearest father, I shall never, never forget. I shall know her among all the rest when I see her again."

"God bless you, my Beryl," he said with deep meaning. "Go and be bright and happy, just as she was, always the merriest of them all."

Somehow, Beryl felt as if she had been in a sanctuary when she went back to her stepmother, and there was a sweet softness in her blue eyes.

Her father, with a touch of compunction for the wrong he had perhaps unwittingly committed toward this loving daughter, prayed earnestly, "Lead her not into temptation, but deliver her from evil."

CHAPTER IV.

A FRESH PAGE.

THAD been no mere pretence that had caused Arthur Farrant to make the well-worn excuse of a headache to prevent his dining on the night that had brought his wife a fortune. A violent nerve pain that left him white and prostrate succeeded the horrible silent struggle to keep up appearances and not to let even his own special servant guess that anything unusual had occurred. The very pain was almost a relief to him. It deadened somewhat the mental torture that was so much more exquisite.

Lying in his room alone, after giving strict orders that he was not to be disturbed, he was at least able to nerve himself to face the future. Perhaps one of the worst stings of his affliction lay in the fact that he had so perpetually to assume a serene cheerfulness he was far from feeling. He used to long to be able of his own power to be solitary at will, instead of having hourly to mortify his pride by asking for every trifling service to be rendered by the hands of

others. People usually pity invalids or cripples, but they rarely realize what that constant galling necessity to be under obligation means to an independent spirit. It was not without a very special meaning that a great reward was promised to the meek. Verily they deserve the inheritance that shall surely be theirs.

To manly, active Arthur Farrant his fate had at first seemed unbearable. Now he had already learnt that there is in truth no such word, although he hardly recognized the divineness of his unknown Teacher.

"Philippa never loved me, or she could not have dealt me such a blow. She is still young, so beautiful, and rich, yet tied to an impotent log like me."

Just for a short hour, in the dusky twilight, the grimdest of all temptations overwhelmed him. If he could but die, the Gordian knot would be so easily cut. There were means even for one as helpless as he. Not poison; he could never obtain any. All his money would not procure him enough to kill a rat. The watchful doctor or his devoted servant would easily have their suspicions aroused if he asked for such a thing.

But his eyes fell on a little dagger on the table beside him, which he used as a paper-cutter. He drew it from its finely inlaid sheath of tortoiseshell

and silver, and looked long at it. It conjured up his first night in Venice, a summer night when the twinkle of a hundred guitars echoed on the Grand Canal, and he, with two or three lively friends, had made the gondolier take them down the darkest, most mysterious-looking waterways, just to feel the enchantment of the time and of the place. Then they had strolled awhile up and down the dim streets, so narrow and so full of little, glittering shops, and he had bought the dagger from a dark, handsome woman whose black eyes had flashed as she said, "A true Corsican, signor, one that has killed, it may be, many—that would kill your enemy, your rival, in a moment."

He had laughed then, and had said, as much in thankfulness as in jest, "As to enemies, I have none." Alas! as he looked at the bright, narrow blade, it seemed as if he had now one most bitter enemy—himself—and one friend only.

He had often asked himself whether he feared death, and the answer had always been a really honest negative. He could not, for Philippa's sake, exactly ask for a long life, yet until now he had been content, even almost happy, thanks to his own inherently wholesome nature. He had not longed, as the model invalid is supposed to do, for a "better world." He made the utmost of the one he was in,

and still thought it a pleasant place, with its kind faces, its good friends, and its sunshine.

But now the sun would shine no longer, and his few pleasures would lose their savor. It had been all for money, miserable money, that Philippa had feigned the trembling of the white hand he had clasped in his, the mist over the eyes that had met his own, filled, he fancied, with a very angel's lovely compassion and self-sacrifice. Fool that he had been, blind fool, to think what he had thought until the rending of the veil.

If he ended the weary fight at its very onset, she would be free. She might even pity him when she knew that he was ready to lay down his life for her, to add it to the other gifts that had not bought her heart. It would be so easy. He had always thought of suicide as an inexplicable thing. Now it suddenly lost its former aspect altogether, and looked almost reasonable. If he went on living, they must separate. There would be much that would be unpleasant for Philippa to endure as wife, yet not a wife.

If he yielded to the impulse that was rapidly becoming a resolution, he would be judged leniently enough. "Poor fellow! Miserable position to be in." He could hear the not unfeeling remarks that would be made. A nine days' wonder in Northbent, an hour's topic at the clubs, and then nothing more.

In the falling shadows the words of the hymn he had said at his mother's knee came back like an echo:

"Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed."

Well, he had tried and failed to make the most of life, and it had practically ended. He did not dread the quiet churchyard; but what came after?

"Teach me to die, that so I may
Rise glorious at the awful day."

He dropped the dagger with a start. A sudden certainty that there was a heaven, and that it was no place for cowards who flinched against the buffettings of an adverse fortune, made him pause. He was not much of a reader, but somewhere out of the past a single line every one knows flashed across his brain:

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

It is the hardest thing of all to do. Soldiers who would have charged with the Six Hundred, or sailors who would have manned the *Revenge* sometimes lose all their courage when the horrible order comes for passive inactivity. "To wait patiently"—all the history of a million martyrs is summed up in that phrase, and Arthur Farrant elected to be of these.

He felt a relief when he had come to this decision.

He would see Philippa to-morrow, and tell her she was free. There should be no repining, no weak grief. She had not faltered in telling him the truth. He would not shrink in making the sacrifice demanded of him. Just for a moment, a sudden vision of Allaronde without its mistress made him wince; but, after all, what was the utmost anguish of loneliness to that awful solitude when two souls were as apart as theirs?

Harold Buchanan had privately given orders to Manners, the servant, never to run the risk of disturbing his master's rest by telling him any exciting news in the evening. So the worthy fellow kept his word, by a mighty effort, whilst preparing for the night, and it was not until after Arthur had slept like a tired boy far into the morning, that he heard that his wife had rescued little Fay Sarel from drowning in the canal.

Then he thanked God humbly that he still lived. Surely, if Philippa dared thus to risk herself for an unknown child, she must be better than he believed.

The servants exaggerated the story until it assumed grandiose proportions. Servants love dearly to impress their listeners, and Manners was not at all likely to lose a chance for making the most of an important event, especially as he had felt compelled to keep it to himself so long.

Once more Arthur could view her as a tender-hearted woman. That dreadful, lurid picture of a beautiful actress, lying to God and to himself at the very altar, faded away. If they must part, at least he would be able to love and honor her as of old, to think of her with the old tender homage. To find that only the feet of the idol were of clay was worth so much, after the desolate yearning for the lost ideal of last night, that he almost felt as if the whole had been restored untouched.

"The mistress is quite well, sir, this morning. She sent early to ask if you had had a good night," concluded Manners.

That little attention touched him deeply, as the merest crumb of kindness from Philippa always did.

"She told me to say, sir, that she breakfasted early in her own room, and has gone out riding."

So Arthur had his chair wheeled away into a quiet corner in the woodland beyond the garden, where there would be no danger of their being overheard, and awaited, with a calmness that surprised himself, the interview that was to decide so much. He had not even brought his dog, so that one or two young rabbits came flirting their white tails very close to him, and he even found himself taking his usual naturalist's interest in their rapid movements and pretty gambols.

While he lay there waiting with enforced patience, Philippa was riding through the lanes, where, in one or two favored places, the hedges were still allowed to grow tall enough to be wreathed with wild roses. She was a creature of moods, intensely influenced by weather, as are so many highly strung organizations. There was something in the freshness of the air, the blueness of the sky, and her abounding sense of life and health, that made her inclined to push aside the complications of yesterday and trust to the impulse of the moment to guide her, if anything occurred to make definite action immediately necessary.

After all, England, in a fine June, was endurable, and though Northbent was dull enough, Allaronde was a pretty house, and she should, perhaps, when it came to the point, be sorry to leave it. She felt suddenly that it was one thing to dream vaguely of beginning a new and emancipated existence, and quite another to practically execute any such scheme. There had been just that element of uncertainty in her early girlhood that made her value the shelter of a safe home. People were apt to say disagreeable things of the most blameless women living apart from their husbands, and, true or not, Philippa hated to be regarded by the world at large with any sentiment but that of respectful admiration.

She felt for the first time that there would be some-

thing attractive in the knowledge that, with a fortune of her own, she would be spoken of as "consecrating her life" to Arthur, if she elected to remain. That it would not really be the case she was well aware, but she felt again a flattered sense that she must have moral excellence of a striking sort, if she could contemplate such a line of conduct.

She had saved a child's life when its own mother had not dared to do so. That fact was surely one which it was excusable to regard with complacency. She would go and call on Mrs. Sarel in the afternoon, although her dulness was a foregone conclusion. Now she came to think of it, "*The Little Convalescent*," which some of her neighbors admired so much at the Academy, must have been painted by this very Adrian Sarel. She found herself disappointed that it should be the case. The man looked as if he were above the dead, stagnant level of commonplace, and what in the world could be more banal than a pale child sitting up in bed?

Yet she was forced to admit that he was capable at any rate of admiring better things, when, five minutes later, she met him alone. She pulled up her horse in a moment with an inquiry for Fay, and whilst Adrian answered her with assurances that the cold bath had no ill effects, she noted how he studied her, and how obviously she came triumphantly out

of the ordeal. There was no suspicion of the offensive optical homage some men pay to every pretty woman. It was the expression of an artist's satisfaction in a thing of beauty, and could not be displeasing even to her fastidious and exacting taste.

Under an oak tree that cast lights and shadows over her clear-cut features, with a rich color on her cheeks and a light in her eyes, she was queenly enough, sitting her handsome horse gracefully in the dark green habit that looked as if it were moulded to the superb curves of her figure. They chatted together for a minute or two, long enough for Adrian to decide to re-paint or destroy "Medea."

"Perhaps you will be at Mrs. Bunting's dance tonight?" she questioned, gathering up her reins to start.

"Yes, we are asked," said Adrian, instantly deciding to go.

"Then good-by for the present. We shall probably meet there."

For all her affected indifference, Philippa enjoyed impressing people. She was perfectly aware of her own picturesqueness under the oak, and liked Adrian Sarel all the better because he was capable of genuine, critical appreciation. He was not a happy-looking man, she decided, though she did not in the least guess what it was that gave him his rather singular

expression of melancholy. It was not the mere friction of the struggle to live; it was the baffled artist ever inwardly protesting against the misuse of his talent.

Philippa went straight to her husband whom she returned. As she walked up the woodland path, with her habit gathered in one slender hand, Arthur Farrant realized, with a throb of pain, how absolutely independent of him she was now. It had been a joy to him to compass her with luxury. She could not lean upon a helpless cripple as other women did on their husbands, but at least he could give her surroundings that satisfied her material wishes. The money that had come to her so unexpectedly would, indeed, have caused a gulf to broaden between them, even had she received the news otherwise.

But there was a look on Arthur Farrant's face that made her suddenly lean over and give him one of the kisses that had been so rare between them. The victory of the night had set its indefinable seal. It unnerved him completely.

"Philippa, my wife," he said brokenly, "what does this mean? I am here to give you back your freedom, to tell you to leave me, and to trust me to shield your fair fame before the world in doing so. Last night you let me know the truth. I have learnt that it was best. I dared not look forward into the

utter darkness of the future, but I shall not fear now. I shall remember that you pitied me, that the woman who nobly risked her life for the sake of a child could give compassion even to him who so wronged her. My dear, I ought not to have let you do it. You were so young. It was my selfishness that made me yield. And I thought I should die so soon. I could bear all until I knew what my life meant for you. I ask you to forgive me before we part for ever, and to let that parting take place as soon as possible. I can make all the necessary arrangements quickly."

It did seem to Philippa as if the events of yesterday had, after some wholly inexplicable fashion, changed her very nature. What had become of that burning desire to be alone and to be free? What prompted her to act again, as she had done before with such fatal results, from the momentary better impulse? She spoke now in the low *voix d'or* that was a more potent charm than her beauty itself, and which she could use with so exquisite an effect.

"Arthur, you are too noble, too chivalrous. It is I who ask forgiveness. I will never leave you. Let us forget this cloud, and 'God send us many years of sunshine days.'" She felt the aptness of her own quotation, and was pleased with it.

"Amen," said her husband with his whole soul, and then there was a pause, in which Arthur vowed

again never to vex her by a word of repining, to do his utmost to make her happy and to be worthy of her.

She played with the great tawny collie that had found its way to her feet. She seemed infected by a sudden and unwonted spirit of girlish gayety that became her, because every part she played was played so perfectly. She laughed and talked until lunch-time with unusual and infectious vivacity, making Arthur humbly thankful for the undeserved reward that his resistance of last night's temptation had so swiftly brought him.

It was a sunny, untroubled morning, one of those rare moments when convention and even work are forgotten, and only the summer loveliness is fully remembered.

There are natures like Philippa Farrant's, that deliberately push aside responsibility and moral effort. But there comes a time when, however rebelliously, they must take up their burden like the rest, and then it is overwhelming.

In the afternoon she paid her promised call at Lettice Close, but Mrs. Sarel was not at home, and in the evening she dressed with her usual care and splendor for Mrs. Beresford Bunting's ball.

The Beresford Buntings were not in the very least like the parvenus of accepted tradition. They were

not in any way aggressively vulgar, and seldom or never dropped their H's. Mrs. Bunting had been a pretty girl, and still dressed as one, and her chief failing, like her husband's, was her dulness. Money and dulness are very often allied, and their union does not breed boredom in such instances, as it so speedily would with intelligent people. Mrs. Bunting had no sort of an idea that she was a dull woman. Unhappily, it was not possible for those brought in contact with her to share the same blissful ignorance."

Mr. Bunting did not notice that the men who smoked his cigars and drank his liquors yawned whilst they did so. He did not brag more than many much better-bred persons, but where the cloven hoof peeped out was in his perpetual acceptance of the infallibility of pounds, shillings, and pence, and the futility of such trifles as art or science or literature. He would tell a rising fiction-writer that he never read novels, with an honest conviction that it was a merit on his own part, and was more shocked to hear that a City friend had actually had the weakness to allow his son to become a violinist than if the same had misappropriated funds.

He was still young, though somewhat stout and florid, and was perfectly satisfied with himself, his house, and his wife, though he treated that lady in

public with the oddly accentuated indifference some Englishmen think it manly or dignified to assume.

To-night they were privately nervous, but outwardly calm. The fine old house they had "restored" rather too much and furnished after the latest fashions in upholstery, was banked with as many orchids and carnations as could be procured. Roses would have been prettier—they always are—but then roses are cheap in June, and therefore inadmissible.

Beryl Millington's heart beat high when the ramshackle village fly stopped at the illuminated entrance, and she glanced away into the park, where an endless perspective of fairy lights gleamed red, green, and blue. She was rather frightened at the gorgeousness of the bedroom where she took off her white shawl, but plucked up courage when she arrived at the ball-room, bright with electric stars, and heard the "Blue Hungarians" striking up the first waltz.

What is it that makes the difference between Hungarian playing and that of any other nationality? There is a spirit, a gladness sometimes sobering into sudden pathos, a wild abandonment in the strains. The men play as if their instruments were part of themselves, as if they had no thought but to urge the flying feet of the dancers.

Beryl was not imaginative enough to feel all the originality and grace of it, but its infectious spirit called a pretty pink flush to her cheeks and a sparkle to her eyes. Mrs. Bunting had a vague idea that she ought to do something for her, so introduced her to one of those pale, dismal little men who are always plentiful at dances, especially in the London suburbs. He condescendingly asked poor Beryl, who had come very early, if she would "care to try the floor." She was desperately nervous of beginning when so few were dancing, but did not like to refuse.

Her small partner could do this one thing really well, and in half a minute she was whirling along the parquet floor so smoothly and gracefully that several male wallflowers looked on approvingly, and one or two went so far as to ask to be introduced to this fresh maiden, whose dress, rather shorter, perhaps, than it ought to have been, showed such a pretty pair of feet and shoes.

Mrs. Millington rustled about, shaking hands with everybody, restlessly eager to catch the eyes of the more important Northbent ladies, and ruthless in interrupting their conversations when she fancied she had done so. She was annoyed to perceive that Harold Buchanan was very late in coming, so late, in fact, that when he did arrive he found Beryl sitting out in the conservatory with quite an experi-

enced air, and chattering away most cheerfully to a very young partner, who had privately decided she was the jolliest girl he had ever met, and relieved his feelings by working her little, old-fashioned fan to and fro with more vigor than grace.

"I hope you have kept me a dance, Miss Millington," he said, with his pleasant smile.

"Oh, I am so sorry," replied Beryl with unfeigned regret; "my card is quite full now. Just see," and with a little look of girlish satisfaction she showed it to him.

"You evidently forgot me altogether," said Buchanan, prolonging the conversation to get an assurance that the shoes fitted. "Not a bit too small, after all," he decided with admiration.

"Why, Doctor Buchanan, I should never have thought of such a thing."

She took him quite in earnest, and he turned away much amused. Evidently she was very young yet. But he had never liked Beryl so well as when he went back to be captured by Mrs. Millington, leaning on the arm of a neighboring vicar, who wore an expression of resignation.

"You should see *my* strawberries," she was saying complacently, "beautiful strawberries, and such a size. I shouldn't like to hurt Mrs. Bunting's feelings, but, really, I see none as fine to-night."

The sight of Buchanan made her stop short, and gave her companion an opportunity of escape he did not fail to seize.

"I hope you've seen Beryl," she began. "Danced every dance, and quite admired. Ah, it reminds me of my own first ball."

"I was disappointed to find Miss Millington's card quite full," said Buchanan, knowing well how annoyed Mrs. Millington would be.

"Card full!" said that lady. "What nonsense! It is quite ridiculous. Of course she will be only too pleased to dance with you."

"I am sure I should not presume to expect her to begin by breaking her engagements," and, with a bow, he vanished, only to be seen in the distance by disgusted Mrs. Millington, who decided, with her usual thorough want of tact, to take her stepdaughter well to task on the subject of dancing with the wrong partners the very next morning.

Meanwhile she devoted herself to Mrs. Adrian Sarel, who was sitting alone, looking at the dancers and wishing herself at home. Mrs. Millington felt it her duty to cultivate her husband's parishioners, she said, and fulfilled that duty now by asking Isabel every imaginable question. She answered gently and patiently enough, but was thinking how much she should like to go out into the garden and see all

the lights among the roses in their dewy midnight loveliness. Balls were all very well for girls, but not for married women, she decided rather wearily.

It certainly was much pleasanter in the cool night air, where a band was playing the "Venusberg" music from "Tannhäuser," presumably as an accompaniment to a feeble trickle of commonplace talk. There were only two persons who seemed to be listening, Philippa Farrant and Adrian Sarel, who stood silently side by side.

Philippa had refused to dance, but not to stroll about in the dangerous midsummer midnight. By this time all Northbent knew that Mrs. Farrant had had a fortune left her, and Adrian had heard the news not without a touch of jealous wonder why so much was given to some, so little to him.

What a glorious woman this was, in the diamonds and brocade that merely seemed like the frame of a splendid picture. Was she happy? he asked his heart curiously. What were the thoughts that made her expression so sad, so wistful? She stood statu-esque in the half-light until the "Pilgrims' Chorus" carried away the last bars of the tripping, evil rapture, changed by consummate genius to such a sob of despair.

Sarel broke the pause that just then was eloquent. "The worst of 'Tannhäuser' is that, in spite of

oneself, it sets one dreaming, and not the wisest dreams."

It was her own thought, though she did not say so. "I want to give my husband a birthday present," she began unexpectedly, "and the time is rather short. Will you forgive my asking here if you can paint my portrait within the next two months? I hear you do paint portraits sometimes, and it would suit me best to have it done in Northbent. I have seen pictures of yours in the Academy. I do not take you quite on trust."

Adrian looked at her with a cynical smile. "You have seen 'The Little Convalescent,' I suppose. Believe me, Mrs. Farrant, I am sorry it should be so."

"It is very pretty," she premised; "but yet——" She did not quite know how she meant to finish her sentence. Adrian spared her any doubt.

"I do not need to be told that it is poor, mean stuff for a man with a brain. But beggars cannot be choosers, and the world likes 'The Little Convalescent,' and buys it, when, as an honest worker, I should starve. You honor me by your commission. I shall do my very utmost to prove worthy of your confidence. Perhaps some day, if you will allow me, I will show you an attempt or two at better things. I have not always been a bondslave among the Philistines."

"Don't we all live in Philistia here?" said Philippa, with a gesture of her hand that included her surroundings. "Sometimes I doubt whether there is any other world."

But, in spite of her doubts, she felt that something new had passed into her life on the wings of the passionate music. The idea of the portrait had come suddenly, like an inspiration. It interested her prospectively. She should, of course, tell her husband, who was sure to be perfectly satisfied.

She went to bed in an unwonted and fresh condition of serene contentment. It charmed her, and she was disposed to enjoy that charm without analyzing it. She looked upon it as the reward for her conduct to her husband. It really was worth while to be dutiful, if it brought such pleasant self-complacency. It had been a long day, but it had ended very well.

CHAPTER V.

TRIFLES.

AFTER the fly had jolted out of the rather long, narrow drive leading to the Vicarage, Betty again, and this time indefinitely, postponed the mending of her tattered sleeve. She at once began to help Bevan to mix the rum and coarse sugar that were to lure unwary moths to drunkenness and subsequent destruction. She was thoroughly in her element, and it was proverbial that "Butterfingers," as the boys called her, from her known propensity for dropping and breaking frail articles, could set a tiny moth with mathematical exactitude and neatness.

Exeats were rare things, and to be enjoyed to the utmost. To-morrow both boys would have to return to school, and was it likely that she should waste such an ideal sugaring night in darning a jagged rent?

To those uneviable persons who have no intimate knowledge of natural history and its world of wonders, insect hunting may appear uninteresting. But

to the better-informed it is sport of a highly exciting sort, with the added advantage of being usually conducted under delicious circumstances.

The thick shrubberies of the garden and the little copse in the meadow next the glebe became places of mystery under their night aspect. The brother and sister, who in their own odd fashion were devoted to each other, wandered about hour after hour, unconscious how fast time was passing, and quite regardless of the heavy dew.

Betty had saved up her pocket-money for a month to buy surreptitiously that bottle of rum. She felt her reward had come for much self-denial when a rare underwing dropped intoxicated into Bevan's bottle. Bevan was always penniless, and as, according to Betty's unformulated creed, it was natural for sisters to give up everything to the boys, it did not occur to her that he might have contributed. Fortune favored them, and captures were numerous.

"Fancy, that poor beggar Brown is in London for the *exeat*—beastly London. Well, I wouldn't be in his shoes. No sugaring there; nothing earthly to do except the pantomime, and that isn't on now."

"I'd rather catch these underwings than go to fifty pantomimes," said Betty fervently. "Oh, Bevan, isn't it a blessing I'm only fourteen. I shall so hate being grown up."

"Never mind, Bet, you'll always be a downright good sort, whatever age you are."

Bevan was not in the least given to paying compliments, but the appearance of that bottle of rum had melted even his fraternal reserve.

Betty and Bevan had nothing unusual about them. They were simply a fresh English boy and girl, supremely and healthily happy. They did not realize how, perhaps, in after life the memory of such evenings would shine out clear and distinct.

Later years may bring love and enjoyment on their wings, but they cannot bring back the ineffable freshness and charm of those pleasures that are so simple, that familiar intercourse that is so perfectly unrestrained. A childhood in the country is rich indeed. It stocks the memory with such a picture-gallery of delights. Many a busy and successful man, many a gifted woman, looks back to those long days spent with Nature as the best of all. They held so much, and were so different from the brief, hurried days we speed through later.

It was very late when they retraced their steps, and even Betty decided it would be wiser to go home by the road than wade through the mowing grass of the glebe and leave tell-tale tracks. Twelve o'clock tolled out solemnly from the church tower, and if the servants were too good-natured to report

them, Mrs. Millington's suspicions would doubtless be aroused.

Something gleamed on the white, dusty road, which curious Betty found to be a letter. It was too dark for reading even its address, so she put it in her pocket to see what it might be.

The vicarage did not boast a latch-key, so the faithful Keziah was sitting up for the ball-goers. She had left the front door unlocked, and fallen soundly asleep. They slipped off their wet boots, and went softly up-stairs.

"Good night, old girl. We've had a jolly good time, thanks to that rum of yours," whispered Bevan, and then Betty shut the door that *would* creak, as doors invariably creak when no one wishes them to do so.

"I'll get up early and mend my dress," she resolved virtuously as she took it off.

The letter, or, rather, envelope, fell out of her pocket as she did so. It had no address, and contained only a slip of paper—a bill. Betty fairly jumped when she saw what it was: "Bennet and Co., Bootmakers. White satin embroidered shoes, twenty-five shillings. Paid." Twenty-five shillings! It sounded a fortune indeed to Betty. It was the bill for Beryl's mysterious present, she felt certain, but how provoking that there should be no name with it.

Wild visions of going to London and making inquiries of Bennet and Company rather commended themselves to her ready imagination.

Stay, though; there was something full of unintelligible words written on the back in a writing that was very familiar.

Betty wrote abominably herself, and in a fit of despair had made an effort to copy a handwriting she happened to admire—a missive in which Doctor Harold Buchanan had “regretted that a prior engagement” would prevent his attending one of Mrs. Millington’s little musical evenings. Somehow, he always had prior engagements when summoned to the vicarage “at homes.”

“I’ve got it this time,” said Betty. “I said I should find out, and I have. But wild horses shall not drag it out of me. I will tell Berry. Perhaps she knows it already. Perhaps he told her himself. Perhaps——”

Betty aspired to be a novel-writer in the future. She had a quick wit, and jumped promptly to a not very surprising conclusion, which was, however, incorrect. Her cheeks grew very pink.

“Berry did look pretty,” she thought. “Perhaps they are dancing together. Suppose sometime——”

Even to herself she did not quite care to pursue her thought, but it was with her head full of suppositions

and the precious paper under her pillow that she fell asleep. She had meant to stay awake to hear all the news, but she did not stir when Beryl, still rosy and bright, came in at half-past three.

It had been a wonderful ball. It seemed as if it were a very long time since she had stood before the little looking-glass, and yet the last dance had come too soon. Every one had been good to her. She had had so many partners. Balls were very delightful things, after all. She put away her silk dress quite reverentially, and rejoiced to find that her shoes were scarcely soiled. Her pretty shoes! A vague wonder concerning them was her last waking thought.

Betty was rather disgusted to be roused by Keziah's seven o'clock rap at the door. She had intended to be up in time to do all sorts of things, and now, unless for the first time in her life she dressed without loitering, she would probably be too late for breakfast.

"Well, Berry," she began eagerly, "was it nice? Did you dance much? Was everybody very fine?"

Betty always asked her questions in breathless batches, and then pulled up abruptly to wait for answers on the same principle.

"It was lovely," said Beryl rather sleepily. "Such flowers, such music; and, only think, Betty, I danced every dance. There's my programme."

Betty took up the pretty blue card, and looked eagerly at the list of names on it.

"What a lot of strangers," she said. "And Doctor Buchanan? Wasn't he there, or didn't he ask you to dance?"

"Why, yes, he did, but my card was quite full. People were so kind. One little man asked me for three. He was rather melancholy, and seemed to take no interest in anything, but he could dance. I never felt anything like it."

"Now, Beryl, did you find out anything about the shoes?"

"Why, how was it possible? But I believe mamma was doing everything she could. She has got them on the brain, that's the worst of it."

"Berry," said Betty, pausing in her hair brushing, "I've found out. I said I should. Bevan and I were sugaring till ever so late. We had a grand time, and caught a magnificent underwing. We did not get home till past twelve, and then the glebe meadow was so wet we went round by the road. I picked up something—this," and she waved her treasure triumphantly above her.

Beryl's last vestige of sleepiness vanished in a moment.

"Oh, Betty, tell me directly. Show it me."

Betty gave her the paper, and laughed heartily at her face of amazement.

"I always did say you were slow at finding out things. Look at the back."

Beryl did so, and for a moment looked more puzzled than ever. Then she too recognized a very unmistakable handwriting. But she waited for Betty to speak, being overcome by the discovery.

"Doctor Buchanan went to town that day. I heard him tell father he was going to some old meeting or other. Depend upon it, he passed along the road and heard what we were saying. Well, I always thought him nice; now I know he's a regular brick," said Betty with decision.

But Beryl was blushing hotly, and was not altogether pleased. What could have made him do such a thing in such a way, if he had done it? She looked at the paper again. Scientific notes, without a doubt, and nobody else in Northbent was scientific. They had evidently been carefully made on the only scrap of available paper.

"Betty, promise me faithfully you will never, never tell anybody," she broke out, with an urgency of anxiety there was no mistaking. "We may be wrong, after all. We are not sure."

"Ah, but I am sure. However, if by 'anybody' you mean mamma, I'll promise."

The prayer bell put an end to this discussion, and Betty hurried down.

Beryl felt licensed to be late. She wanted to be alone and think over the affair quietly. As she plaited her soft hair, she wished with all her heart that Harold Buchanan had not done this thing. She should feel so shy and awkward with him, and then—dreadful thought!—the paper ought to be sent or given back. She was still grateful, but she hated secrets, and this one would be such a burden. And to think that she had not even danced with him!

When at last she went down she found her step-mother seated at an empty breakfast-table.

Mrs. Millington always piqued herself upon getting up at precisely the same time after a party. She was quite as apt as the rest of the world to be tired and cross, so that other people wished she would stay in bed as they did, instead of tacitly reproaching them by her punctuality, and working off her fatigue in irritability and fault-finding. It is doubtless a virtuous thing to rise early, but it is a pity this virtue is so rarely practised without causing an undue amount of self-glorification.

She looked sallower than ever after her late hours, and was clearly in a bad temper. She had had a passage of arms with Betty, and, as usual, had

been rather worsted by that brisk adept at repartee. Her greeting was ominous.

"I am glad to see you at last, Beryl, though such irregularity as this is enough to upset the house for the whole day. I want to speak to you very seriously. You are grown up now, but I feel it my duty to tell you I was anything but pleased with your conduct last night."

Relieved, but wondering, Beryl was silent, awaiting an explanation.

"Doctor Buchanan came to me and told me that you had refused to dance with him. Now, Beryl, I want to know how you could be so rude to a friend of mine."

Beryl grew hot. Blushes showed so easily on her fair skin, and that mere name was enough to make her uncomfortable.

"He did not ask me till quite late, mamma, and I had no dances disengaged."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Millington, with tartness. "I saw you dancing five or six times with that stupid little Mr. Skelton, a mere boy."

"It was only three waltzes," urged Beryl, "and when he asked me I had no idea I should have so many partners."

"I am going to speak plainly to you," began her stepmother. "Do you think your coming out is an

expense in new clothes incurred just for your own pleasure?"

Beryl said nothing, and Mrs. Millington continued with acrimony, "The object of my taking all this trouble is to get you married early. There are four girls in this family, and it is my duty—a duty I shall not shrink from—to try to see you all settled. You are eighteen and when your father dies you will not have a shilling, and must go out as a lady help; for I am sure you are not clever enough for a governess in days when there is so much nonsense about certificates. Therefore, when I take you out you must make the most of your chances, for Betty will be coming on fast."

Beryl's usual equanimity was violently disturbed. She was very young for her age. She had not looked into the future with the bold eyes of a fashionable schoolgirl. She thought of love as something too sacred and mysterious to be discussed, of marriage not at all. She was shocked at Mrs. Millington's matter-of-fact statement, which to her appeared so especially, unattractively blunt.

"I am sure I would rather be a maid-of-all-work than try to make any one like me in that way," she broke out, full of righteous indignation. "I've always tried to be good and obedient, but I would rather stay at home all my life than go out thinking



people were watching me to see what chance I had of getting married."

"It is not likely you will marry at all if you go on in such a way and show such temper. Doctor Buchanan is a very estimable young man, and, naturally, I should have been better pleased to see you with him than with that ridiculous boy. Remember that, Beryl, and if he asks you to play tennis with him at any of the parties I shall be really angry if you make these silly excuses. As I said before, you must marry early. At your age many a girl is a wife."

Beryl's was a naturally sweet disposition, but she was roused into well-merited sarcasm. "At any rate, you were not, mamma."

Mrs. Millington was desperately sensitive to any allusion to her own age. "And why?" she retorted, almost too angry to get her words out fast enough. "Why, because I was taking care of my father."

A servant fortunately interrupted this stormy discussion, and Beryl ran up-stairs and flung herself on her bed, crying bitterly though quietly.

Oh, if she had been allowed to take care of *her* father, instead of only being regarded as an encumbrance.

It is a hard thing to be the eldest of a family in these days, when people are so desperately fearful of



marriage being a failure that half of them never marry at all. Even heiresses are sometimes left to wither unsought; and to look at the serried ranks of rosy, cheerful girls devoid of any special gifts or graces, is to wonder compassionately what will be their after-fate. Happily, most of them start with a hopeful certainty that they will find Prince Charming. It is only as the years go on and no one of the kind appears, that they begin to be haunted with apprehensions.

A little later they learn that, *nolens volens*, the single life has to be faced as a certainty in nine cases out of ten, without even the pitiful comfort, which yet is a comfort, of having loved without return. It looks gray and unattractive to those who feel that their happiness would have lain in managing a house, in cherishing children. They turn wistfully to their young married friends. A gulf separates them now.

Those who have work or art to fill their hours are not much to be pitied. They have the second best, nay, perhaps the best, fate. But the ordinary, commonplace untalented woman, who finds youth slipping away and nothing but solitude and poverty ahead, surely she merits a most respectful compassion. It is not her own fault. She could have loved and toiled for a husband and children, and been richly content. Yet her little efforts to fill the va-

cant hours of her long days, ungladdened by any hope of change, are often enough laughed at.

Beryl was essentially a womanly woman. Her quiet life was full and interesting to her. She had not until to-day learnt to look forward further than to the next of those red-lettered festivals that brought back the boys.

Her stepmother's unrefined nature had always been antagonistic to her own, yet, for her father's sake, she had been gentle and submissive. But this last command she would never obey. She, her mother's daughter, to lay herself out—poor child, she had little enough idea how—to attract some man to marry her? Never. Even in her thoughts she did not like to own that Mrs. Millington had almost named one person as "suitable." The very word was abominable.

"I am not pretty, or clever, or rich," thought Beryl for the first time. Hitherto she had been too much absorbed in her many interests to trouble about these facts. "I should not mind for myself, but to be a burden on poor father or to subsist on mamma—no, I cannot, I cannot. Why aren't girls allowed to work like boys? Why am I put into the world at all? It cannot be that I am meant to try to make some one marry me."

Then she thought of some of the girls she knew.

One had just been married to a man old enough to be her father; another to quite a boy, three years younger than herself. She would rather die. Oh, she wished she was a child again. After all, being grown up was very wretched, she decided, drying her eyes and remembering that there were half a dozen belated duties to be done before she and Bab had their daily struggle over "Chickseed without Chickweed;" for Bab was very backward in her studies.

Adrian Sarel was inclined to see matters in a pleasant light when Isabel poured out his coffee—real French coffee—on the morning after the ball. He had not told his wife of his new commission, although it had filled his mind ever since Philippa had offered it.

There had been a shade of difference in his manner to Isabel since the episode of the canal. He had been unaware of it, but she had felt it keenly. Exaggerating her own momentary lack of courage into an habitual condition, she had been unable to forget it. She would so eagerly have welcomed any sign that it had not affected Adrian, but no such sign gladdened her.

She had not looked well at the ball in a dress that was unbecoming and, truth to tell, shabby. Adrian had felt annoyed that his wife should not hold her

own and justify his choice in the eyes of other men. Isabel was not in the faintest degree a man's woman. She had married her first love—a rare enough occurrence—and, what is rarer still, she viewed the rest of mankind with unaffected indifference, only making exception in favor of the two or three particular friends of Randie's who had been good to him.

"I have some news for you again, Belle," said Adrian, whom Fay, on tiptoe, was feeding with ripe strawberries. "Mrs. Farrant has commissioned me to paint her portrait for her."

Mrs. Farrant had spoken to Isabel kindly on the preceding evening, yet somehow she had not conquered a mistrust of her that was almost dislike. She would not have admitted it, and could not have explained it, but there was an unacknowledged jealousy latent in her heart of this stranger who had saved Fay.

Not jealousy of the ordinary sort. She could not doubt, had never doubted, Adrian. It would have been so impossible for her even to look at another man that she credited him with much of her own innocent trust and faith. Besides which, she was accustomed to hear him discuss beauty as part of his stock-in-trade. But to be reminded of her failure, to reflect that another had snatched back her own child to safety, wounded her. Necessity had, however,

made her much too practical not to rejoice in any form of answer to that prayer for the daily bread which was precarious enough in its more enlarged sense.

"You will like it, then, Adrian?" she asked timidly, understanding by his very voice that he was satisfied.

"Like it? I should think so, Belle. I hate painting portraits, you know, but I am going to get her to let me make a picture of her instead; then I shall enjoy it. I mean to be virtuous and get the second 'Convalescent' on the stocks to-day. But first get me Rossetti's poems and that little American Tennyson, there's a good girl. I want to hunt subjects."

"Then you won't paint this morning?"

"Not just yet, at any rate."

Isabel sighed. More than once or twice Adrian had offended important personages by breaking agreements concerning pictures through sheer idleness. The sooner he did the work, the sooner he would be paid, and with what thankfulness would she see her lean household exchequer replenished. She fetched the two well-worn books, and saw Adrian establish himself under the cedar in an easy chair with a cigarette. Fay sat demurely beside him on the grass, spelling out "Alice's Adventures."

Then Isabel went into the house. Randie was looking rather pale and heavy-eyed this morning,

and said his head ached; but Adrian, blowing blue rings from his cigarette, only smiled at her ridiculous anxiety for the child's little ailments.

He was in a delightful frame of mind. A picture of rare quality, with a beautiful face as its dominant note, floated before his eyes. He was very fond of poetry; that is to say, of such poetry as dealt with passion and was vivid with color and picturesque diction. He would have followed in Rossetti's footsteps if he had been free, he fancied. He did not care about the real. He wanted the ideal. Reality was apt to be unsatisfactory and mean. He liked luxury and splendor. His tastes had been half starved all his life.

If he could have planned it, he would have had it all so different. It was not money he desired, exactly; it was enough money not to have to cramp and restrict his career by perpetual counting of the pence.

Genius is supposed to thrive upon poverty. Unluckily, it does not, except in the rare cases of those elect souls who are not governed by outward circumstances, but who can battle to their own superb goal without noticing the incidents of the journey.

Adrian felt as if he had come upon an oasis in his desert. He understood Philippa sufficiently to be assured she would not be one of those who would feel

proud to hang on the walls of the Academy as Mrs. Arthur Farrant. He forgot all about "The Little Convalescent," and wandered away into a very satisfying dreamland. He had been a fool to fancy he could paint "Medea" without a model. Of course, the pretty face of his fancy, that was so oddly like a real one, just wanted the convincing vital spark.

What should the subject be? Vivien? Guinevere? He could fancy her both these, but she herself might not be willing to be so impersonated. Besides, they had been painted very often, and never successfully. Rossetti might give him newer ideas. He took up the little, shabby, foreign-printed book, bought years ago in Paris, and turned over its pages, reading a few verses from time to time. Fay was reading too, and half aloud, but she did not disturb him, neither did incongruous extracts from "The Walrus and the Carpenter" affect his visions.

Adrian liked rather theatrical effects of warm reflected light. Flickering flames leapt round a picture that was taking form in his imagination—"Sister Helen," kneeling before a fire and watching the waxen image of her false lover melting before it, knowing that he is dying in torment because she has dared to sell her own soul for his.

Another time he would have laughed to scorn the mere idea of inducing a lady he scarcely knew to

lend him her features to mould into the mask of such revenge and such cruelty. At this moment all things seemed possible. Life would not be worth living if these rare, delicious instants of fresh hope did not occur.

Adrian presently went into the studio, but it was only to make the roughest charcoal sketch of the composition of "Sister Helen." He forgot how many sketches that were nothing else he had in his portfolios. Absorbed and abstracted, he was lost in a dream of creation, in a certainty that this time he had caught his ideal and held her.

Isabel looked in at the open door. She never spoke to Adrian when he had that especial look of abstraction. But she saw that he was not at work upon his commission, and sighed as she turned away.

Art was perfectly inexplicable to Isabel Sarel. Nature she knew and loved intimately. But Adrian in certain phases was beyond her comprehension. She dreaded those phases. They were always succeeded by periods of depression. She acknowledged her own ignorance humbly, but was sometimes secretly not a little cheered by discovering that, as far as pictures were concerned, most people were of her opinion.

Randie did not get better as the day wore on; two bills came in, immediate settlement requested; Fay

utterly refused to do her simple lessons; and the inexperienced cook spoilt the strawberry jam by burning it. Small grievances, perhaps, but important to Isabel. She bustled about from nursery to kitchen, tired and hot.

Adrian found the summer morning delicious. Its hours went by all too fast. He was to go to Allaronde in the afternoon, but the thought of this particular interruption was not unpleasing.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PICTURE.

ARTHUR was pleased and touched when Philippa, after telling him more of the incidents of the ball than she usually condescended to do, announced that she had given Adrian Sarel a commission to paint her portrait.

"I am a person of property now," she said laughingly, "and so, for once, I thought I would give you a present. I never give you presents."

"You gave me yourself. I wanted nothing else."

This was the sort of speech Philippa liked, and this one emboldened her to continue the subject she had been carefully considering. "I expect the sittings will be fearfully tedious, that is the worst of it. I don't think I should care to go to that comfortless cottage day after day," and she hesitated a moment.

"Would he come here, or must an artist paint in his own studio?" inquired her husband, always pleased at a plan that involved any sort of hospitality.

"Will you try to persuade him, for I am not cer-

tain?" replied Philippa. "If he consented, we could arrange the north drawing-room. The light could be made to do, I think."

"Well, I know nothing about all that, but I will certainly ask him, if you are sure he is a good man. I do not want a portrait of you to be a mere daub."

Philippa felt ruffled at even this inferred reflection upon her judgment. "I saw a picture of his in the Academy," she continued, with a shade of coldness. "I am not the person to act upon a mere impulse to help a poor artist. I do not believe in making art a sort of servant to charity."

But Arthur was quite satisfied when he heard the word "Academy." He had always accepted a pilgrimage to Burlington House as a wearying but necessary duty in the days when he was like other men, and, if he had thought about the matter at all, would readily have accepted the verdicts of the Hanging Committee as infallible. In common with nine out of every ten Britons, he viewed the Academy as the only centre of the art world, and conceived that to be hung there was the Ultima Thule of every painter's ambition. There are plenty of people in England whose only connection with art is an annual acute headache.

Adrian paid his visit about four o'clock, and was taken at once into the garden by Philippa, whom he

met strolling in the woods, and who gave him a rather reserved welcome, though he satisfied her critical taste fully as well as he had done on their previous meetings. She liked playing the rôle of Lady Bountiful toward him. She liked to feel how much she had in her own hands. It was delightful to be thoroughly independent, to know that it was her money, and not Arthur's, that would buy this picture.

Arthur was in his chair in his usual place under the cedar, and Sarel experienced the shock of pained surprise common to those who saw him for the first time. He was in a bright condition of hope, and as he shook the hand held out to him so warmly and readily, his own strength gathered an added value and importance in his eyes. So this was the husband. Such women ought not to make such marriages.

The subject of the picture was, of course, uppermost, and Arthur made his suggestion with an unmistakable earnestness. He did it simply because Philippa had appeared to wish it, and because he himself was pleased with the idea of watching an artist at work. He was fond of pictures, if the subjects were well within his own range, but he knew nothing about Art spelt with a capital and treated as an abstraction.

Sarel put an utterly different construction upon his

invitation. "Jealous," he decided mistakenly. "Afraid to let her out of his own sight."

Then he thought of the shabbiness of his own home, and of the rough, ugly studio, smelling of half-dry mortar and bare of comfort. Philippa, even in the guise of Sister Helen, did not suit those surroundings.

"If I might see the room, I could tell at once if the light would be good," he said finally; "and if you are quite sure it will not be inconvenient for you to have it littered with a painter's paraphernalia."

The announcement of Dr. Buchanan interrupted the discussion; but soon after the greetings had been exchanged, Philippa led the way to the north drawing-room. It was full of flowers and dainty traces of her occupation, for in summer its coolness often made her choose it in preference to her own boudoir.

In one comprehending glance Adrian took in the amount of thought and taste that had made it so perfect in its details. Money can command upholstery, but no amount of upholstery can give that delicate air of individuality that emanates from the presence of certain women and makes their dwellings places of charm. The great basket of pink poppies and grasses, the open piano with a pile of new music, the books upon the tiny tables, these manifested the touch, but did not constitute it. It was subtler; it

seemed to be in the very air, just touched with the faint perfume he had already learnt to associate with her.

"Will it do?" she asked, in the tone in which she had spoken of "Tannhäuser."

Adrian detected the alteration as distinct from that of Mrs. Arthur Farrant. It made him alter his own. In the garden he had felt at last, and not relished the sensation, that he was a poor painter receiving an order like any tradesman. This atmosphere was different.

He glanced at an open book with an instinct of curiosity. Bound in white vellum, with an elaborate silver marker fastened to one page, it was the same he had been reading all the morning. There was an analogy between them. His Rossetti was shabby and tattered, hers a miracle of exquisite paper and printing. But the contents were the same. So it must be with the two readers. He thought a little grimly that the bindings of the two books were somewhat symbolical.

But the time was not ripe yet for him to broach his petition. Her husband had decided she should be painted in her riding-habit. He had a secret objection to bare shoulders and arms in pictures, and admired his wife most in her outdoor aspect. She could not oppose him, but she thought the sugges-

tion commonplace, and was vaguely disappointed at Adrian's ready acquiescence.

"It will give me a chance to learn her face thoroughly," he reflected. "Time enough then to tell her of my other personal ambition."

It seemed more difficult than in the morning. Already the ideal had slipped away a little further. Still, the present was rich, the future richer, with vague, undefined possibilities of success. As he stood and measured his stately subject, the sudden joyful sense of power and capacity came back to him. He was an artist in the presence of his model, not a poor man taking something like alms of a wealthy woman.

It was very soon decided that the portrait should be begun within a day or two, yet they still lingered. Adrian was struck with her wide knowledge of the newest, freshest phase of modern art and modern criticism. She spoke of the two or three living men who still paint pictures with the restrained fervor of a cultivated, carefully weighed enthusiasm.

"I wonder you are not a painter yourself," Adrian said, recognizing her intelligence, her feeling for what he held to be highest and truest.

She smiled sadly. "I cannot do anything. I sing a little, play a little, read, and think—think till I am tired of thinking. But I have no talent for execu-

tion. I can only dream, and envy those who are inside the gates of the Garden of Eden. We live in different worlds. Yours is the best."

She spoke slowly, but there was an unmistakable earnestness in her words. These moods of something very like despair because she could do nothing to free the thoughts locked in her heart overcame her periodically. She erroneously fancied that they were unusual, and therefore of value, whereas in reality they were merely the fruits of that most commonplace of all conditions—discontent.

Perhaps it is only those who have published verses that have utterly failed to appeal even to the smallest coterie of listeners, who quite realize how very little interest individual emotions excite; that is to say, unless they are expressed with a rugged strength or a richness of metaphor and simile that gives them all the vividness of novelty.

Philippa looked at art, as outsiders always do, as a definite achievement, forgetting that her impatience would never have brooked the tedious labor by which achievement is effected.

"Do not envy us or me; pity me," answered Adrian. "My world is empty of all the beauty which surrounds you. It is the desert outside the garden, where the thorns and thistles grow plentifully. I have to degrade art into a trade to live. I have to

stifle ambition, to forget my own desires, my own ideals. I wish with my whole soul that by any other means I could get a living—the merest, simplest necessities. To be an artist starving to feed his genius is one thing. To be a second-rate painter, forced to toady to dealers for the sake of his family, is another. Forgive my plain speaking. You tempted me to it."

Was no one happy? Did no one live a life in any sense complete? Philippa asked herself petulantly as she replied, "I think I can sympathize, if I cannot understand."

The expression in her eyes, the inflection in her voice, held something that flattered Adrian back to a triumphant belief in his own power. He was so hungry for appreciation of his more aspiring self as distinct from the humdrum producer of "*Little Convalescents*," that he seized with joyful, illogical eagerness on the assurance of her faith in him as an artist, forgetting that for this she had no tangible guarantee.

Writers, musicians, all who create, know how rare and how precious is praise given in the right way. Not in coarse doses of flattery, but in a discriminating appreciation of their aspirations as distinct from their work, which comes seldom enough.

People generally believe their own characters to be complex, if not unique. They cry out eloquently

that they are misunderstood, and forget to try to understand the rest of humanity. Adrian told himself that he loved his wife. But he had for years unconsciously put her in a class very apart from his own.

When they went out into the sunny garden, under the cedar, he and Philippa slipped back to their old positions in a moment. Arthur expressed his satisfaction when it was arranged that within two days the portrait should be begun.

Isabel acquiesced abstractedly when Adrian went home. Randie was much worse, and Fay too was complaining of headache and sore throat. Both children passed a restless night, and very early in the morning Adrian went to summon the doctor.

Harold Buchanan was in sole command, Doctor Palmer having gone with his family for his annual holiday. He found Isabel pale after many sleepless hours, but moving about the orderly nursery attending to pettish, flushed Fay and quiet, heavy Randie with the natural deft aptitude born in the few women who make the world so incomparably smoother by their precious gift.

Buchanan was fond of children, and spoke to them gently and kindly; but Fay hid her face in the pillows, and had almost to be forced to allow him to look at her. When he had left the French maid in

charge, and followed the young mother into the dining-room, he shut the door.

"I do not want to alarm you needlessly, Mrs. Sarel, when I hope it will be quite unnecessary, but there is a good deal of scarlatina in the village, and I am very much afraid both your children have it. Fortunately, they are healthy and it is a favorable time of year, so that, with good nursing, I have no doubt they will pull through satisfactorily. I will do all I can, you may be very certain."

"Thank you," said Isabel quietly. She did not manifest fear. She rose instantly and unhesitatingly to a troublesome emergency. She hastened to put a few necessary questions, and surprised Buchanan by her readiness of suggestion and resource.

Adrian was less reasonable and more apprehensive, but the doctor decided immediately that he would be worse than useless in a sick-room, and also that the studio, from its size and bareness, would be the best place for the little patients.

"Take my advice, Mr. Sarel," he said decidedly. "Get a lodging in the village, and give up your studio. You might get quarters, I believe, at Rose Cottage, where I am. Then you could go on with your painting, instead of being here in quarantine, and yet would be close at hand if you were wanted."

To Isabel this suggestion was a genuine relief.

Much as she loved Adrian, she saw in an alarmed perspective of anticipation the difficulty there would be in attending to his comfort. She knew him well enough to be assured that any sacrifice would depress him beyond even her powers of passive endurance.

"You will go, won't you, Adrian?" she said beseechingly when the doctor had left the house. "I had scarlet fever badly when I was a child. There is practically no danger for me, but for you it is different. You have never had it. For my sake, for theirs, you ought to be careful. What should we do if you were laid up?"

"Go to the workhouse, I imagine," he retorted drearily. He rebelled uselessly against the trouble that Isabel accepted with such unswerving composure and resignation. As usual, she had no leisure to be fearful or despairing.

"I have told Doctor Buchanan that I am sure we can manage without a nurse," she went on calmly. "It would be very expensive, and Aline is quick and clever, and not in the least afraid. She is devoted to Fay, and, I am sure, will have more influence with her than a stranger. I am very strong, and, you know, I was with Mrs. Miles all the time her children had fever."

So Adrian easily allowed himself to be persuaded. He objected to any appearance of cowardice on his

own part, but he had the intense nervous shrinking from infectious disease that he had for most things that were unsightly or unpleasant.

In the afternoon he went to Rose Cottage, to find the vacant rooms had just been let, and as he came away he met Arthur Farrant in his well-known chair, drawn by a quiet pony and attended by Manners. He could not drive in an ordinary carriage, but was fond of these unexciting peregrinations that were his only link with outside life. He never passed an acquaintance without stopping, and had a double reason for doing so now. A chance encounter with Harold Buchanan had filled him with a pity for the artist which his pale, distressed face augmented.

"I am so very sorry to hear you are in such trouble, Mr. Sarel," he said, with a sincerity it was impossible to mistake. "But you must cheer up, for children have to go through these things, and the doctor tells me there is every chance of their getting off easily. He says you have decided to leave home—very wisely, as I think."

"Yes, I am looking for lodgings, and not finding any."

"I wish, instead of doing so, you would be our guest. We have plenty of rooms at your disposal, and it would be more convenient for you to paint the

portrait without the trouble of going to and fro. We are always glad to have people staying with us."

This was utterly untrue as regarded Philippa, who cordially disliked sustained effort to be companionable, little as she troubled herself to make it.

Those women—an enormous class—who do not read except from a vague sense of duty, enjoy the dullest visitor who will keep up a mild trickle of trivial conversation while they accomplish quantities of useless and often downright ugly fancy-work. They conceive themselves thus to be spending their time well. But the intellectual-minded who will not learn that it is useless to expect congeniality of ideas, suffer intensely from the invasion of visitors who leave them no silent hours.

Adrian accepted the cordially given invitation with but little feigned and no real hesitation. They were all quite right. He *would* be better out of the way. Then there was the saving of expense. He hated to view the matter from that standpoint, but it would obtrude itself. That it would be an untold relief to Isabel not to have to think of his meals he did not reflect, but not the least of her trials was her husband's small, fastidious appetite.

"Then come to-day in time for dinner," finished Arthur, well satisfied. "Bring all your things, and make yourself as comfortable as you can."

So it was decided. The village fly was piled with easels and canvases, and Adrian drove up to Al-laronde with his favorite palette in his hand.

The children were no worse, and Isabel stood smiling bravely at the door. The cottage looked a little deserted and dreary when she went back alone, telling herself how thankful she ought to be for this opportune departure.

Aline was with the children, and Isabel knew that her first duty would be to rearrange the studio as a bedroom, with the help of the strong but stupid girl who was their only other servant. It looked very empty without the great easel, and for a moment Isabel's heart sank. Adrian had kissed her very kindly, but she felt that it was no struggle to him to leave her.

She was not worthy of him. He was so gifted, she so ignorant. She would do her utmost, oh, her utmost, to nurse the children that were his too. That link must bind them fast, if the other tie weakened. She, who was never demonstrative, leant down and kissed the vacant chair where he so often sat smoking. It might be weeks before he occupied it again, weeks before the careless laughter of the children sounded from the nursery. She had failed once before; now she would succeed.

She did not allow herself to look too far forward as

she moved about, gathering up the papers, books, and sketches that must be put aside lest they should harbor infection. She knew she was at the beginning of a trying time, but she had learnt the wise lesson of taking short views that saves so much misery.

Before the doctor came again it was all done, and the two feverish children were established in their new quarters. They slept a good deal at intervals, and Isabel, as she sat in the still room, with its single pale light, watching and thinking, had never been so solitary before.

When Adrian had said "Good-by," without any attempt to ask himself for how long he was leaving home, he had experienced a transitory sense of remorse. It vanished very soon. It was a long time since he had enjoyed any sort of luxury, and, as he dressed for dinner in a perfectly appointed bedroom, he felt as if he had a respite from the existence that was more and more irksome, and as if he had slipped back into the place he was born to occupy.

Like the majority of us, Adrian felt that, in common justice, he was entitled to a share of purple and fine linen, though he did not theorize as to the validity of his claim. He wanted his own niche lined with velvet, and if it had been, he would probably have troubled himself little enough about other peo-

ple; nay, he would almost have had a vague, satisfactory assurance that because he was comfortable and satisfied, therefore they must be equally at ease.

Philippa was glad when she heard of his coming. Arthur had not often done anything that had pleased her so much. Her introduction to the artist had been interesting, and her curiosity to see the other pictures of which he had spoken increased.

When Adrian went into the great drawing-room, he liked it quite as well as the one that was to be his studio. It had an air of splendid comfort, with its flowers, its starry electric lamps with soft yellow silk shades, its many books.

To be able to strew an infinity of tiny tables with fresh-cut magazines, newspapers, the latest French novel, the last new poet, without counting the cost, is by no means the least pleasure of a plentiful income, but it is one not very frequently indulged in, after all.

Philippa, in a long dress of soft black, welcomed her guest cordially. The dinner passed in desultory conversation, Arthur, on his couch, waited upon by Manners, at one side of the table, giving, as it were, the reminder that riches too were vanity. When it was over, she played the piano softly—chiefly scraps of Chopin and Grieg, remembered fragments that had appealed to her imagination.

The spell was broken by the advent of a melancholy curate with a chess problem, into which the invalid threw himself with immediate eagerness.

"They have taken your easel and canvases into the north room, Mr. Sarel," said Philippa when the chess players were in full debate. "Will you fulfil your promise now, and show me some of your sketches?"

Isabel had seen to the packing, and had ventured, rather trembling at her own audacity, to include "Medea" with the two full-sized canvases sketched in readiness and the half-finished replica of "The Little Convalescent." To her it was a profoundly uninteresting picture, but it might be that Mrs. Farrant, who was not at all like herself, would find it attractive. If she would buy it, what a blessing it would be!

"I have scarcely anything worth looking at," replied Adrian, whose courage had revived in this bright, congenial atmosphere.

The electric light searched every corner of the half-dismantled room when they reached it, and, to his astonishment and anger, fell full upon "Medea," standing on the large easel, placed there presumably by a footman with a sense of the fitness of things. He guessed in a moment why it had been sent, and was indignant with Isabel for forcing him to make a

curious but necessary explanation that would sound apochryphal.

That Philippa saw the striking resemblance to herself was quite evident. She decided that this Adrian Sarel had taken an unwarrantable liberty, and resented it with a sudden flush and a flash from her deep eyes.

"I was not aware," she began very coolly, "that when you engaged to take my portrait you had already done so; that is to say, if you do me the honor to consider the girl you have depicted like me. I notice you have made her younger than I."

"Then you see it too?" exclaimed Adrian unexpectedly. "I never meant to let you see this picture, which was—fortunately, as it turns out—refused by the Hanging Committee. I am not so presumptuous or so destitute of taste as you suppose. I dare say you will not believe me, but I could bring a dozen witnesses to prove that this picture was painted months before I ever saw you or came to Lettice Close. That it resembles you I cannot deny. It shall not annoy you any longer," and, with a quick gesture, he seized a palette knife and cut to pieces the labor of many months in as many seconds.

It had been taken out of its frame after it had been sent back, so the work of destruction was fatally easy. Adrian had grown to hate it now that he

recognized it as a failure. He breathed more freely when it was ruined.

Philippa was almost too astonished to remonstrate. "Who was your model?" she asked brusquely, with an abounding curiosity, a vexation that another woman should be so like herself.

"There comes in the strange part of it," said Adrian, quite himself again after his brief outburst. "I had none. I painted the figure in the usual manner, but the face was purely my own fancy."

She believed him implicitly. He spoke with an undeniable truthfulness, but it was none the less mysterious.

"I am so sorry my hasty words made your deeds so destructive," she began gently. "I have made you destroy the work of months. It is not possible for me to compensate in any way for the mischief I have done so unwittingly. The remembrance of tonight will haunt me as a very miserable one."

Then Adrian felt the decisive moment had come. "There is another curious coincidence to add to the list," he said slowly. "Yesterday I read Rossetti and dreamt a dream of 'Sister Helen.' Yesterday you read the poem also. I want to paint it as it is told. I want the world to feel the magic of the white witch, pale and beautiful, kneeling in the light of the fire that is burning a man's soul. I could paint

it—I believe I could paint it well—if you would let me do as greater artists have done, and use the face that best realizes the vision of the ideal before me. I am sometimes nearly desperate when I think that the years are fleeting past and nothing is done. I *must* succeed before I die. I cannot debase myself for ever."

His fire communicated itself to her, and she spoke impulsively, warmly, thrillingly. "Paint me as Sister Helen, if I am worthy of being the centre of a great picture. I shall be proud of my own face when I hear that it is your masterpiece."

He might have been a Raphael to her fervent imagination, almost to his own, considering the access of self-belief in his power that came to him. The real facts were quite dwarfed and overmastered by all this embroidery of hope and sanguine fancy.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE.

MR. MILLINGTON never solved the mystery of Beryl's shoes, though whenever she was short of conversation she brought up the subject, preferring as she did the most threadbare topic to any interval of silence.

Beryl kept the piece of paper guiltily, but lacked both courage and opportunity for giving it back. She did not meet Harold Buchanan half so often as her stepmother had hoped. There had been several cases of scarlet fever in Northbent before those of the little Sarels, and the doctor absented himself with private thanksgiving from the usual tennis parties, on the plea of possible infection. Beryl thought about him more than she was aware, and liked to hear the stories current in the village of his kindness to the old men and women to whom she dutifully ministered, and who enjoyed her visits much more than Mrs. Millington's.

Betty kept her own counsel and her promise. It was an effort, but the delight of reflecting that she

knew something of which Mrs. Millington was ignorant sustained her, though she was disappointed that nothing had come of her discovery.

Children always expect that every small event will have immediate and apparent results. They only learn gradually that the great game of consequences is apt to be played very slowly.

Betty was always the newsmonger of the family, and this morning, when she ought to have been doing her German exercise, she was nowhere to be found. She took lessons with some other girls from a daily governess, who had her trials at times with her lively pupil.

Beryl was sitting in the little summer-house, with its boxes of mignonette and trailing honeysuckles, industriously knitting while Bab read aloud in a melancholy voice a dismal story, in words of one syllable, of a lost dog. It was a depressing narrative, but it is by no means easy for a writer to be cheerful when his genius is fettered by these irritating limitations.

They made a pretty flower-framed picture. The wind stirred the child's golden curls unheeded by Bab, but the perfume on its wings brought sweet, intangible dreams to Beryl—those thoughts of youth which go out into the future that seems so illimitable then, but hurries on so closely in the track of the flying years.

Bab frankly hated her lessons, and was fidgeting to be out in the hayfields; but Beryl could always manage her very well.

The lesson was cut short by Mrs. Millington, who came bustling down the garden.

"Beryl, where is Betty?" she began, telling Bab, to her delight, that she might go.

"Doing her German, I suppose," replied Beryl tranquilly.

"Now, Beryl, you are really most tiresome. Alice and Monty went to Miss Price more than an hour ago, and Betty has not touched her German, although all her books are open in the schoolroom. I should have thought, at your age, you might have been capable of looking after her. But no; nothing is ever done in this house unless I do it myself. Mrs. Bunting said, only the other day, when I was telling her the days of all the different parish meetings, 'How you can do it all is what I never can make out.'"

Truly, when given out in Mrs. Millington's voluble staccato, the list did sound endless, and she was particularly fond of detailing the number and variety of her occupations, quite ignoring the fact that much of the drudgery connected with them was done by Beryl.

Certain busy persons are so aggravating in that exemplary apportionment of their time concerning

which their friends never hear the last word, that the veriest idler appears excusable, because less annoying.

"Really," she continued hurriedly, "I shall have to see if I can manage to send Betty to school. Her idleness, untidiness, and pertness are beyond everything. And I am not sure whether that Fräulein, as she calls herself, is at all an improving teacher for her. In my time no one learnt German, and I am sure Betty is no example of any good coming of it. It fills her head with all sorts of improper ideas. Look at this, and then tell me if I was not perfectly right when I said that three and sixpence a week extra was too much."

Fräulein Wehren, like all Germans, regarded her Schiller as only one degree less sacred than her Bible. She was not a wise woman, and so it came to pass that Betty, who might only devour "Ivanhoe" by stealth, and who was not allowed to touch a modern novel, was revelling in "The Robbers."

Beryl remembered enough of her own studies to recognize with amusement that the love-sick Amalia's song had been selected as a suitable exercise in translation:

"His embraces, raging enchantment,
Mighty, fiery, with heart beating to heart,
Mouths enchain'd. Night before us.
Our spirits raised heavenward."

Betty's rendering of the impassioned original was not clinginglly exact, and was certainly a trifle incoherent.

Mrs. Millington read this choice extract from her very blotted exercise book with withering emphasis, and Beryl burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"Be quiet, Beryl," said her stepmother tartly. "Here am I already worried to death, and this is all the sympathy you give me. Here is Betty rushing about the village, no one knows where. There are four cases of scarlatina in the place, and now I hear those tiresome little Sarels have both got it."

"Oh, poor little things," said Beryl, all sympathy in a moment.

"Yes, and what is more, I am told they are frightfully poor, so that makes it all the more provoking. It would really be quite a mercy if that lame boy should be taken, for he is never likely to be of any good in the world."

Mrs. Millington made this remark without at all realizing what it meant. Happily, Providence does not often choose to rid our neighbors of their responsibilities just because we see so plainly the desirability of such a riddance.

Beryl did not put her indignation into words. She knew from experience that it was quite useless, so

she merely listened in a silence that was full of inward disgust.

"As to Mr. Sarel, he has gone to stay at Allaronde, if you please, leaving his wife to do the nursing. I always had a prejudice against painters and writers, and all people of that sort, and I think even you will admit I was right this time. Then, too, it is most unheard of for a young man to be staying in the house with such a good-looking woman as Mrs. Farrant. But there, of course, you know nothing of the consequences of such things, and I should be the last person in the world to tell you of them."

Mrs. Millington always spoke out her thoughts, if the ideas that trickled through such feeble brains are entitled to so dignified a name. She expressed a great horror of gossip, but she could never refrain from communicating any scrap of news she might hear to any adjacent listener. She very often made Beryl's cheeks burn, as they did in this instance.

To simply state a fact in the old blunt fashion that shocks our fastidious taste when we come across it in a play or novel, is not a common failing nowadays. But it is doubtful whether the suggestive hint is not a more dangerous instrument, after all. Mrs. Millington often began a story and broke it off short mysteriously. The pity of it was that she ever began it at all.

A loud voice became audible, to Beryl's infinite relief.

"Mamma," cried Betty, in much excitement, "there's been a mad dog in the village—oh, perfectly mad. It was a strange dog, and it looked dreadful. It rushed along with its tongue hanging out of its mouth, and everybody was so scared. The men all ran into their houses and shut the doors, but I waited in Miss Pimley's little garden to see what would happen. It went on quite straight, not seeming to see anything. Somebody must have gone to Rose Cottage, for Doctor Buchanan had got a gun, and he fired from his window and hit it, and it rolled over in a minute. He did shoot well. And then he came out and took away the dead dog."

"What a mercy no one was bitten," said Beryl, who had grown rather white. "I suppose it really was quite dead?"

"Of course it was," said Mrs. Millington with decision. "Would any sane person have touched it otherwise. Now, Betty, you have had a narrow escape, and I hope it will be a lesson to you. Go indirectly and do your German. Beryl, you had better help her, or she will never have it ready in time."

"Come along, you dear old duffer," said Betty affectionately, when her stepmother had gone indoors. "I know ten times as much German as you

ever did, but if you will look up the words in the dictionary, I can tell you more about the mad dog as I go along. I do wonder mamma never said that if I had been bitten it would have been a judgment on me for going out instead of sticking indoors. Besides, I've something to say to you very important about you know what," and she wagged her head knowingly.

Mrs. Millington was safely in the kitchen, overseeing the concoction of a weak soup for invalid parishioners. She was not a greedy woman. She cared very little what she ate and drank, and regarded this as a virtue of no mean order, when it was no virtue at all, but an accident, owing to an imperfect sense of taste. Unluckily, she had no power to discriminate between good and bad quality, none of that dainty nicety that demands perfection in the simplest meal, and makes breakfast an idyl and dinner the satisfying sequence of careful reflection.

She was not illiberal, but the vicarage puddings and the vicarage soups were too indifferent to escape scathing criticism. "It do my heart good to see Miss Beryl when I be bad," an old carpenter had been heard to say, "but I'd as soon make my dinner off my own glue-pot as that jelly of Mrs. Millington's she brought with her for my quinsy throat."

The schoolroom was shabbily furnished and not at all orderly, but it was pleasant with big jars of wild flowers and morning sunlight. Betty began to scribble her exercise rapidly.

"I shan't bother much about seeing if my prepositions govern the right things; there's no time. I like German, but I fail to see why on earth the prepositions can't behave reasonably. Berry, how quiet you are. Don't you want to hear my news?"

"Of course I do, Betty. And you're quite sure that dog is dead?"

"As a door-nail," said Betty, frowning over her mental declension of a refractory adjective. "I like Dr. Buchanan, and when he was picking up the dog I went and told him I thought him very brave. He laughed, and said, 'Poor beast, I hate to kill anything, and especially a dog. I should like to send them all to this wonderful Pasteur if it were possible.' Then he told me a little about Pasteur. It was so interesting. And then he said, 'I went to a lecture about hydrophobia the other day, and, like an idiot, lost some notes I had made upon it. I always thought I must have let the paper fall between the station and the vicarage.' Then I forgot all about the shoes, and said, 'I picked it up one night when I was out sugaring with Bevan. I knew it was yours by the writing.' And then I remembered, and he

must have remembered too, for he looked very hot and uncomfortable. I felt so stupid. At last he went on, and asked why, if I knew whose it was, I had never given it him. So I was obliged to say. And he was awfully nice, and yet I could see he was in rather a state of mind too. ‘I must ask Miss Beryl to forgive me,’ he said, ‘and I thank both of you for having kept my little secret.’ And, Beryl, he said he had noticed how pretty your feet were, and so——”

“Betty, do finish your German, and don’t talk such rubbish. I tell you what I shall do. I shall post that wretched piece of paper.”

Beryl felt very guilty when, the same afternoon, she dropped a letter into the pillar-box. It contained a short note in addition that had cost her much misgiving and had been re-written two or three times:

“DEAR DR. BUCHANAN,—I must thank you now for the pretty shoes, as I did not like to do so before. I am sorry you wanted your notes.

“Yours sincerely,
“BERYL MILLINGTON.”

It came to Buchanan next morning as he sat alone at breakfast, and he read it with great amusement.

“What a shy little thing she is!” he thought; “very different from Betty. Yet I like Betty too.

It is really a pity they have such a terrible step-mother. The mere sight of Mrs. Millington will be enough to keep any man from falling in love with any of them."

He had immense confidence in his own level-headedness, but he did not drop the little note into the waste-paper basket immediately, as was his custom, but threw it into a drawer.

He had enough to occupy his mind just now. That the dog he had managed to shoot, greatly to his own surprise, was mad, he had no doubt after a careful examination. That it had, luckily, bitten no one in Northbent was certain, but whether it had encountered any strolling animal before it came into the village was quite another matter. There were so many scattered houses and so many dogs. There lay the danger that he hoped would not strike any one but himself. There had been one or two recent cases of hydrophobia, and Buchanan, like every one else of any intelligence, was keenly interested in the Pasteur discoveries, then just being noised abroad.

He had taken a good degree, and had plenty of professional ambition. Sheer want of money to buy a partnership or set up independently made him perforce compelled to content himself with his rather humble position, but he had a sanguine disposition and a well-grounded belief in his own power, and if

a man cannot succeed with these, nothing will help him.

He walked down to Lettice Close thinking of all this, but was quickly recalled to the immediate present by the news that Randie had had a bad night and that his temperature was very high. Fay was cross and intractable, but had slept fairly well.

He noticed how keen the mother's anxiety was, and did his best to cheer her. He had seen plenty of anxious parents before, but never one so reserved and so practical. "The fever must run its course. The weather is favorable, the child healthy, despite his lameness," he repeated.

His kindly sympathy was very welcome, and while he was lingering to give some final directions, a basket containing a few bantam's eggs was brought in.

"Miss Millington has been to inquire, and she thought perhaps the children might like these," was the message.

Isabel was very much pleased. Cut off as she was from friendly intercourse, and almost a stranger in the neighborhood, with a reserved nature's inability to make itself readily understood, it gladdened her to have this simple gift. The sweetest chord on the harp of life is kindness, and it may be touched melodiously by very small fingers.

"That was Miss Millington at the ball the other night, I suppose?" she asked, as the young doctor moved toward the door. "She looked so bright and happy, as if she had never known a care or a trouble."

"Appearances are a little deceitful, for Miss Millington has a stepmother," said Buchanan with a smile.

Isabel went back to her patients happier. She was a born match-maker, like all women except the objectionable few who view every engaged man as an admirer the less for themselves. She found herself reflecting that Harold Buchanan and pretty Beryl would look well together, and laughed at herself for her fancies. But they did her good, and let her drift away for a moment from the anxieties that were besetting her so closely. To have one feeble, suffering child is bad enough; but to have two to nurse at once needs a very special temper and ability.

Randie was very ill; there was no doubt of it. The beautiful little face lay flushed upon the white pillow; the great blue eyes were heavy and dull. If she should lose him! The anguish of the thought was enough to make her shrink from it without asking herself to face the prospect that did not seem remote.

Fay needed all her patience, all her tenderness, in her absolute rebellion against sickness. A hundred

times she protested she was quite well, that she wanted to go out and play in the garden, and, above all, to go to her father. She would not eat, and talked incessantly, now in French and now in English. Or she would try to sing, and then break off impotently, saying that her throat hurt her.

A week wore away, and Isabel felt as if she had never known any other existence than this. Adrian wrote her notes and sent daily inquiries, but she would not see him, and the fact that he made no great effort to break her resolution strengthened it. Fay's perpetual longing for her father distressed her greatly. She still brooded over her own fancied cowardice in letting Philippa rescue her from the canal, and it seemed now as if all her efforts to win the heart of the child who, although her own, was like an alien to her, were in vain.

It was her punishment, the young mother reflected, forgetting that it had always been the same. Fay had been from the first her father's daughter, Randie her own little son, her idol. She accused herself of having thought too much of the one who was so loving, and who now, in his pain and fever, could still smile at her approach and take the medicines from her hand so uncomplainingly. But her heart yearned toward Fay as it never had before.

Poor Isabel, bereft of her husband, with that sting-

ing sense she tried so bravely to utterly stifle that the separation was no such trial to him, clung to her children. It did not matter to Randie that her dress was worn and shabby, that she was careworn and old so long before her time. She was "mother," and those two syllables contained to him all the best of his little world.

One day a trifling incident broke the monotony of the hours. She received a kindly letter from some relations of her father's whom she only knew by name as living in India. The old lady wrote that her husband had made enough money to retire comfortably, and that they had taken a house at Eastbourne. They had heard of Isabel's marriage, and, having no children of their own, longed to make her acquaintance. Would she and her husband and little ones pay them a long visit whenever it was convenient to them to come?

Isabel replied very gratefully. She was so glad to think there were those who had loved her dear father sufficiently to remember his orphan daughter. She told Mrs. Boyd all her present troubles, and there was something in the letter that made the old coffee planter surreptitiously go out and despatch a quantity of expensive toys to amuse the little invalids, while his wife shed tears.

Who can wonder that the eyes of plain, solitary

women fill when they see the clinging touch of little arms round the necks of their married friends, when they watch the rosy mouths and peach-blossom cheeks held up so eagerly for kisses? The husband's first passion may not change into that tenderer affection, born of respectful knowledge, that is the rare but exquisite crown of quiet happiness; but the little sons are true lovers and in joy over the little daughters' beauty many a mother sweetly buries her own youthful vanity.

It was settled that when the children were better they should go to Eastbourne, and Isabel amused herself and them by stories of what they should do by the sea when they were well again. It was the one bright spot in a very dreary period, and to think of obtaining without any money difficulties the change of air that would be necessary by-and-by was a great comfort.

Isabel's was one of those rare natures that are intensely grateful. There was something pathetic in the fact that kindness always surprised her, something noble in the truth that she could always accept it with a thankful humility. Adrian passed his life in angry, protesting wonder why other men had so much more than he; Isabel in unquestioning submission to any misfortune or sorrow, and ready gladness for the least ray of sunlight.

Harold Buchanan learnt to like and honor her very quickly. A doctor sees the genuine side of human nature too clearly to be very often mistaken. He has rare opportunities of judging character, and must at times be amused at the false estimates given by those who only see the outside view of their acquaintance.

He was very busy, and somewhat perturbed by his own private fears. The mad dog episode had been witnessed by only a very few people, and as the principal local gossips were not among them, it was but little discussed and soon forgotten. His own promptitude in shooting the animal, "which very likely was all right, after all," was somewhat condemned. It had not bitten any one, which was a proof that he had been premature.

Mrs. Millington rather assented to this theory. A vague, uncomfortable idea that the young doctor occasionally amused himself at her expense had taken possession of her. He had refused to come to a picnic she and Mrs. Bunting were organizing together, and showed so little inclination to further her schemes that she was beginning to think that, after all, Beryl had better marry the chess-playing curate. When the long evenings came, he should teach her the game, she decided. It was fortunate it was so difficult.

CHAPTER VIII.

“THY PLEASURABLE ASPECT.”

HE week that was so long to Isabel passed like a happy hour to her husband, in spite of his half-imaginary anxiety for his children. For he was anxious when he thought about them which, truth to tell, was not particularly often. When Fay had been rescued from the canal, he had felt as if she were all the world to him, but the emotion had been fugitive. Yet Adrian was not indifferent or unloving; only it was so long since he had been quite free to work, not only without hindrance, but in a sunny atmosphere of admiring encouragement, that he was immersed in the satisfying present.

His was the true artist temperament. He had never cared for anything else as he cared for art. He had married Isabel because her beauty appealed to him, and because he had seen that she loved him. He was very fond of Fay. He liked her grace, her quaint, old-fashioned talk, her French nature. But he could do without her, he could do without any

one, while he was in the first flush of a new inspiration.

At Allaronde there were no petty annoyances to check the soaring flight of fancy and drag him down to commonplace. He heard nothing of those household matters which he so cordially disliked. Instead of the pitiful efforts of an incompetent cook, there were dainty dishes and choice wines that helped to stimulate his excited and hopeful energy much more than he knew. Instead of noise and bustle, there was the luxurious calm of the wealthy, perfectly ordered house.

For the first two or three days he had salved his conscience by toiling at "The Little Convalescent." He had got up betimes in the bright mornings, and painted away diligently, if not very conscientiously. For always before him was the vision of a great picture, a picture he could work at lovingly and sign proudly.

Arthur Farrant greatly admired and liked "The Little Convalescent," and was warm in his praises when it was finished. He was immensely impressed with Adrian's skill, and not a little moved when he heard that the model was a cripple and the painter's own son.

Between Philippa and Adrian there was a tacit intimacy that had a curious charm, which he felt

with a special intensity when she looked at the painting in silence. He did not want her to profess to commend things of this kind when she alone knew what he could do, what he meant to do in the near future.

The sittings for her portrait took place in the morning, and, very contrary to their expectation, all three enjoyed them. Philippa daily filled the great china bowls with roses or masses of honeysuckle and foxglove. The French windows were always wide open, for the enjoyment of the June days that were so cloudless, and Arthur's couch was drawn near them.

He had never known his wife so beautiful or so charming. She was happy, and the happiness overflowed in bright, witty talk. She made a good sitter. She was perfectly content to be idle, and quite free from any restlessness.

Adrian had genuine pleasure in learning by heart the face that haunted him. The portrait should be as good as he could make it, though, after all, it was to him but a study for "Sister Helen." He was indefatigable, and in the afternoons, when Philippa was driving or walking beside her husband's chair, he stayed indoors making sketch after sketch with ever-increasing satisfaction.

The curate came to lunch when Sarel had been a

week at Allaronde, and afterward settled down to chess with Arthur under the cedar, while he and Philippa strolled about, followed by Kismet.

The dog was dull and languid, responding very indifferently to the caresses of his mistress. He did not like Adrian, and manifested his antipathy by an occasional low growl if he attempted any overtures of friendship. Philippa was very fond of animals, and treated them with a tenderness she never condescended to show to men and women, or even children.

She talked to her companion now as if the acquaintance of days had been a friendship of years.

The ways of falling in love are legion, but there is none more subtle or more seductive than the sudden apparition, amidst uncongenial surroundings, of a perfectly congenial companion.

Adrian was too much occupied with his new idea to be conscious that he owed it in any way to Philippa Farrant. He accepted her society as part of the pleasure of being at Allaronde, without inquiry as to the importance it relatively occupied.

Already, as they loitered about in the checkered shade, she was thinking how powerfully she influenced him, how readily he fell in with her suggestions and theories, how curiously their tastes harmonized. She had begun—and very prematurely—to

rejoice that she at last had a friend who understood her. Mistaken phrase, for, except as the visionary central figure of "Sister Helen," Sarel thought very little about her.

If on the night of the ball he had half yielded to a momentary disloyalty of thought to his wife, it had passed utterly. Isabel had never done more than enchain his fancy, but he honored her, and no other woman had ever, or seemed, indeed, ever likely to come between them. His unspoken conviction that marriage was something of a failure in his case had hardened him against temptation of that kind. For beauty he had a great enthusiasm, but he viewed it, as usual, rather as part of his stock-in-trade than as invested with any of the glamour with which most men endow it.

But it was a long time since he had encountered any one to whom he could descant on art as he did to Philippa. She was a fascinating listener, and, after all, this is the rôle in which a woman is most enticing in masculine estimation. The man who does not enjoy talking about himself and his pursuits is so rare a creature that American beauties are wisely careful to enter Society with the latest Wall Street quotations on their pretty lips.

"I have made some headway to-day, Mrs. Far-rant. I could not sleep, and I was up very early. I

have done a rough charcoal sketch of ‘Sister Helen,’ full-sized, and if you care to come and look at it, I should be very glad to have your opinion as to the pose.”

Arthur had been told nothing of the forthcoming picture. They had not discussed the subject at all; Philippa—because she liked to fancy the artist confided in her, and in her alone; Adrian—because he had a profound contempt for the very undeveloped art sense of his host. He never cared even to impress those whom he thought ignorant.

They went indoors to the room that was now spoken of as the studio, and which looked, indeed, very like the studio of Adrian’s boyish imagination, and very different from his bare surroundings at Lettice Close.

The canvas was turned to the wall, but Adrian took it up and placed it on a large easel. Philippa looked at it long and attentively. The simple charcoal outline held something “*Medea*” had never held after the most careful painting, although there was an analogy in the accessories of the two pictures.

A dull fire smoked and smouldered. Something hung suspended above it—the waxen image, nearly melted. Beside it knelt a woman, tall and stately, with loose, disordered hair and bare arms. Her beautiful, clear-cut face was evidently meant to

catch the full reflection of the flame. Its expression was one of concentrated purpose; no remorse, only hatred, in the deep-set eyes.

Philippa's eager imagination imbued the outline with life and a full glory of intense coloring. "If Rossetti were alive, he would be satisfied," she said, after a long silence. "I know it is only the beginning, but you have got the soul of it there; the rest cannot be impossible. Seriously, Mr. Sarel, I believe it may be a great picture."

"The worst of it is," said Adrian, trying not to show his satisfaction at her words, "people do not read poetry nowadays. They will not understand my meaning."

"And if they do not, what does it matter?" she interrupted. "Besides, that is surely an exploded fallacy. I grant you, poets make no fortunes, but yet, when a new voice has something new to tell us nobly, there are always some listeners. Finish 'Sister Helen' for the elect few, for whom nowadays so very little is done, and be satisfied that perhaps you may make a very few more learn to read a poem because you have painted its heroine."

Adrian was silent. He noticed a slight defect in the drawing of one of the arms, and began to correct it with an intentness that made Philippa a little envious.

She would *make* him listen to her, she thought, and, taking up the vellum-bound Rossetti, she began to read the poem aloud in her rich, musical voice. She opened in a low, quiet tone, but after a verse or two she threw dramatic expression into every line.

Adrian forgot his drawing, and turned toward her, feeling an admiration that had a touch of reluctance in it. He wronged her by a passing wonder whether her own past held any secret that enabled her so to identify herself with such a tragedy of love, revenge, and hatred. It did not. She had often played with edged tools, but lacked sufficient inducement to be tempted to use them. “‘Lost, lost, all lost between earth and heaven,’” and she let the book fall suddenly.

“You are a wonderful reader,” said Adrian with a coldness that repelled her for an instant and then vexed her. “You made me feel the horror of the thing as I never have before.”

“Do you believe a woman could avenge herself like that?” asked Philippa curiously, “or do you think she would have yielded to such urgent prayers? Your Sister Helen looks as if her resolution were of iron.”

“The only woman I can be said to know intimately would certainly have yielded, but I cannot even picture her in such a position,” replied Adrian. “As

to the rest, my ignorance ought to prevent my answering such a question; yet I have a theory that women can be very cruel, and according to that theory I mean to paint. A good woman is the second best thing in life, a bad one quite the worst."

"And the best thing?" Philippa thought she knew the answer as she put this question, but she found her tongue strangely unwilling to pronounce the word "love."

It did not come from Adrian, who was touching his drawing here and there with anxious elaboration. "Art," he replied, with a certainty that sounded as if his whole creed were contained in the three letters, as, in fact, it was, in spite of a good deal that would have disillusioned a man less visionary.

"That is what always makes me feel such a pariah, and makes me wonder for what purpose I can have been put into the world," Philippa exclaimed with a genuine ring in her voice that told that she meant what she said, and was not merely posing. Her longing to do something was never so potent or so painful as when she saw another person attaining, or even approaching, the goal of an ambition that to her seemed noble, whilst she herself played the tame part of onlooker.

Adrian was not a flatterer, or even a coiner of pretty speeches, but he was too grateful to allow

such an opportunity of being commonly gracious to pass, especially as he could be truthful as well. "You make a mistake in supposing that there is nothing of any worth except achievement. It is such women as you who inspire men to achieve."

He made the fatal mistake of believing that because he merely regarded her as the superb lay figure that was to make his masterpiece, she would understand and accept this modest position.

She did not, but took it as an expression of a homage to her intellectual qualities, the thing she most craved, for which it was far from being intended. Plenty of men had made love to her, but not one of them had interested her, perhaps because they succumbed too quickly to the physical charm she could so easily exert. This man was made of different stuff, she determined, and was unlikely to be swayed entirely by appearances, yet he too recognized in her those rare attributes which he could not refuse to acknowledge and admire.

There was a pause, broken only by the scratching of the charcoal against the rough canvas. To Adrian it was occupied with an effort to satisfy himself as to the disposition of a fold of drapery; to Philippa it was irradiated with a dazzling vista of prospective hours of happiness.

The conversation was ended, to her vexation, by

the sound of Harold Buchanan's well-known voice on the lawn.

"If you do not mind, Mrs. Farrant, I will go and see the doctor. I am always glad to hear the news," said Adrian.

He went out under the cedar, sulkily followed by Kismet, who had been moving about the room.

"I am glad to say your children are going on as well as we can reasonably expect," was Buchanan's greeting. "My chief fear is lest the nursing should be too much for Mrs. Sarel."

"Oh, my wife is very strong." Adrian was thinking what color "Sister Helen's" draperies had better be, and was balancing tones and depths too anxiously to be really attentive.

"Selfish idiot!" commented Buchanan mentally. He had a very poor opinion of Adrian, which this remark strengthened into positive dislike.

"Strong or not, in my opinion she is overdoing herself," he said coldly. He too wronged Sarel by the thought that in the presence of such a woman as Mrs. Arthur Farrant it might be possible to be forgetful of nearer claims.

One of the worst penalties of being an artist is that outsiders cannot view life from an artist's standpoint, and quite neglect to try, so that the unfortunate artist is usually very harshly judged. Every

fault and every peculiarity are laid at the door of his ability to paint or write, and, with really inferior people, that he does so at all is the subject of a faint wonder, not unmixed altogether with pity that a man who might be succeeding—or failing—in the City should so waste his time.

Buchanan was too clever and clear-sighted to estimate art in this preposterous fashion, but he did feel indignant that this tall, handsome dreamer should show so little consideration for the patient wife into whose eyes the mere mention of his name brought a quick brightness.

“Your dog seems rather out of sorts, Philippa,” said Arthur, struck by the restless manner in which Kismet was running about, and perceiving that his favorite doctor and his guest did not get on together particularly well.

“Let me look at him,” said Buchanan, whose mind was very full of the subject on which all his reading for the past week had turned. He had noticed nothing unusual during his short visit, and was surprised at the thrill of excitement he felt. Just for one instant the scientific inquirer in him was uppermost; the next, he felt almost ashamed of his own anxiety to see and judge for himself, remembering what that seeing and that knowing might imply.

But the dog shrank away from him, as it had

always done from strangers, and whilst he was trying to attract it a servant came out with a peremptory summons to the other end of Northbent, which he had no choice but to obey immediately.

He walked away with his mind much occupied. Of course, he might be rushing to ridiculously hasty conclusions, but there was undoubtedly something curious about the look of the dog. Mrs. Farrant was so attached to it that even if he dared tell her of his misgivings she would probably only laugh at them.

His best chance would be to make another effort to examine the animal, and then to frankly tell his friend what had happened. He would have a hard task to doom poor Kismet, but if he could assure himself of even the slightest danger, it would be his duty to act very promptly and decisively.

He would stroll up to Allaronde after dinner, and carefully prosecute his inquiries. This, however, proved impossible, for he had to attend a drunken carter who had fallen from a hayrick. He was fearfully injured, and Buchanan had to watch beside him for hours.

It was an exquisite evening, and Philippa rather suddenly decided to go for a drive, whilst Manners followed her husband's chair in his favorite peregrination through the village.

Adrian had fully intended to walk down to Lettice

Close and see his wife in the garden, but "Sister Helen" seemed to beckon to him. He had never felt such a satisfaction in any picture. Even to his exacting eye, the charcoal study appeared fairly good. If he were alone for the next few hours he could begin the picture itself.

Everything faded out as he stood before the white, empty surface. He was alone with the dreams that so surpassed all reality. Isabel, the children, the pitiful, grinding remembrance of poverty, all these were no more. Hope and he stood in the shadow world, peopled with vague creations. He knew now where and why he had failed with "Medea." He exulted in the self-confidence that is so alien to vanity.

A very keen observer, scrutinizing his second painted outline, might have detected a slight inferiority to the bold grace of the first sketch. To himself he seemed to be improving his original with touches that felt inspired. No gladness of utmost completion ever compares with this rapture of anticipation. He did not notice that Kismet was slinking about the room. His whole being was concentrated in an intensity of effort. If he tried his utmost, surely he might force open the thrice-locked gates that lead to the temple of fame.

A few brushes had fallen to the ground, and the

dog presently seized one of them and began worrying it. It was a favorite brush Adrian perceived, when the sound made him turn his head. He tried to induce Kismet to put it down, but the dog paid no attention to him. He was impatient and hasty, and, without reflecting that it was a somewhat foolhardy proceeding, he tried to take it away.

With a low growl Kismet sprang at his arm and bit him slightly, scarcely breaking the skin, just above the wrist he had bared for greater freedom of action. Adrian was startled, but not much alarmed, especially as the dog loosed his hold in a moment, and ran away through the open window.

"Nasty, surly brute," he commented, picking up the cause of contention. "Luckily, the bite is a mere nothing, and I can go on drawing."

But he soon found this impossible. The interruption had banished his ideas and inspirations, and he took up a book and lighted a cigarette. He did not like to tell Philippa what had occurred, for she had two or three times accused him of teasing the dog. When she returned, Kismet was nowhere to be found, and her anxiety was great lest he should have been lost.

Adrian was less happy than he had hitherto been that evening. A rather tardy compunction for his wife's solitude and trouble depressed him. He

would go to the doctor early next day, he decided, and if he considered it wiser to get a nurse, he would put his pride in his pocket, and ask Arthur to advance him a small sum upon the portrait. He thought a little wistfully of the children, and, for the first time, he missed Fay.

Philippa studied his face covertly as he sat reading while she played the piano. It was sadder than she had yet seen it, but he looked very handsome under the flattering subdued light. Such a man, such an artist, should have been free, she decided. The dull household cares were not for him.

Arthur lay upon his couch with a not especially high-class comic paper in his hand and an amused smile on his lips. She looked at him with contempt. The old liking for what was trivial and commonplace—nay, vulgar—that had always irritated her, struck her afresh with an added force.

Then, for the first time, she dreamt a dream that made her expression strangely exquisite, though neither of the two men observed it.

Supposing she, with her wealth and her beauty, had been in Isabel's place, married to a husband whom she could admire and reverence as able to win the homage of the world. Life might have been something worth living then, worth enjoying. She could have been all in all to a husband she could

have loved. That transient sense of satisfaction in a prospective career of self-renunciation had soon been forgotten. The gulf that separated her from Arthur could never be bridged; their natures were too diverse.

And Adrian Sarel? Did he, too, feel all the misery of untoward circumstances, uncongenial surroundings? He seldom spoke of his wife. Was that little, dull woman in any sense a companion for the man who could paint "Sister Helen?" Children! What were children in a home so poor as theirs must be? Again and again, as she saw the dark head reflected in a mirror opposite her, did she wonder whether such thoughts as her own ever passed through his brain.

When a woman admits tacitly that here is a man she might have loved, then the costly first step has been taken.

CHAPTER IX.

A DOUBLE EVENT.

HE next day was heavy and thundery, but Harold Buchanan, as he sat at breakfast in his small but comfortable lodgings, did ample justice to the meal, although he had left the death-bed of the injured carter long after sunrise. He was thoroughly healthy, and frequent glances at a medical journal had no kind of effect upon his appetite, although to supersensitive tastes it might have appeared a rather ghastly form of literature.

He was a great favorite with his landlady, and when her small daughter brought up a relay of hot toast, she volubly gave him the latest piece of North-bent news, which made him look rather graver than it seemed to warrant.

"Please, sir, they sent down this morning first thing to know if Mrs. Farrant's dog was 'ere. It's lost, and they are in a reg'lar way about it up at Al-laronde. They thought it might 'ave followed you."

So Kismet had run away from home without any cause. Of course, it was highly improbable that he

had been bitten by the strange dog; but, on the other hand, he was often in the road outside Allaronde, and if such a catastrophe had occurred, the sooner the poor animal was found and shot, the better. The dog had certainly looked dull and out of sorts for several days past. It was, of course, more than possible that he was suffering from over-feeding or some other minor evil.

He was thinking it over, and trying to remember and connect dates and occurrences, when "Mr. Sarel" was abruptly announced by an untidy servant who evidently strongly disapproved of such early visitors.

Adrian had not forgotten his resolution about the nurse, and had determined to go to Buchanan and to settle the matter before he started on his rounds. He had not slept well, and looked rather pale.

"Have a cup of coffee," said the young doctor hospitably. "I know you cannot have breakfasted yet, and you look rather fagged."

Adrian had not expected such a warm welcome, but it paved the way better for what he had to say, and he accepted the offer gratefully.

"You will forgive my invading you at such an hour," he began, "but the fact is that you frightened me a little about my wife, and I wanted to say that if a nurse is necessary, a nurse must be procured. I

am a poor man, much poorer even than people think," and Adrian smiled rather bitterly, "otherwise my wife would not be doing as she has done."

Buchanan was somewhat melted by this frank avowal, and liked Sarel better than he had ever done previously.

"Of course, a nurse is a good thing," he replied; "but perhaps I spoke too hastily yesterday, and we may manage to do without her. Besides, I am afraid Mrs. Sarel would resent an intruder with energy. I have seen many devoted mothers, but I never before saw one who combined so much tact and capacity with her devotion. No; I will make a bargain with you to tell you at once if I think Mrs. Sarel should be relieved, and in the mean time I will warn her that if she wears herself out unnecessarily, we shall have to take the law into our own hands. Your French maid is a good, clever girl, and could do much more if Mrs. Sarel would allow it."

He poured out the coffee as he spoke, but a less self-controlled man would probably have let the cup fall, for as Adrian stretched out his hand across the table to take it, he saw a mark upon his wrist that his quick eye knew for what it was.

"Hurt your wrist?" he questioned, with well-assumed carelessness.

"A mere trifle," said Adrian, with an accent of relief in his voice due to gratitude for the staving off of that detestable prospect of discussing money matters with Arthur Farrant. "When I was painting yesterday, that big dog Kismet got hold of one of my best brushes. We had a difference of opinion, and he snapped at me, I suppose for objecting to let him devour it. As you see, he scarcely broke the skin," and he pulled up his coat a little way.

"Take my advice, and have it just touched with caustic," said Buchanan, wondering if his assumption of indifference was quite successful. "Sometimes in hot weather a little wound will inflame and be unpleasant."

He was so fearful of frightening Sarel that he forgot how utterly immersed he was in his own doings, how little likely to have attached any importance to the shooting of a dog in Northbent which scarcely any one except himself and Betty believed to have been mad. Besides, plenty of dogs bit when they were perfectly sane, and he kept reminding himself that he had no sort of definite proof that Kismet had been bitten.

But Sarel, though he had no idea where the doctor's thoughts were wandering, took quick alarm on other grounds.

"Thank you for the suggestion, especially if you

can carry it out at once. It is my right wrist, and if it did inflame, my painting might be stopped."

"Oh, no fear of its being so bad as that. However, I'll cauterize it here now, just to be on the safe side."

The little operation was quickly and dexterously performed, and, after thanking the young doctor, Adrian added to his good-by, "Do you mind not mentioning this either to my wife, who might be afraid of my being hurt, or to Mrs. Farrant? She always said I teased the dog, and might fancy I chastised him for snapping and tempted him to run away."

As the gate clicked and Sarel walked out, Buchanan looked after him gravely. Pasteur's very name was almost unknown then, except to a few advanced scientists, so that Buchanan did not think, as most people think now, of a journey to Paris as the first expedient. Besides, his case was at present utterly unproved. He was too practical and too prudent to let his mind dwell on any horrible surmises.

There was but one thing he could do, and he promptly did it. He was a good shot, and he put a revolver in his pocket. It was within possibility that he might encounter Kismet, and have some chance of looking at him. To shoot another dog on suspicion was not a thing he wished to do, but he must not hes-

itate if he had even the faintest cause for doubt. When he had come to Northbent, he had resigned himself to a humdrum routine practice; but, after all, he decided, excitement was not altogether absent. It never will be so long as disease and death last.

There was a heavy thunderstorm in the middle of the day—"Just the usual Saturday weather," as Betty Millington remarked gloomily. She hated to spend a moment indoors, and it was hard that, when she had got through her week's work so virtuously that she positively had no lessons in arrears, a scheme of going out caterpillar hunting for the boys should be so frustrated.

Beryl sat darning in the schoolroom with perfect philosophy, trying to keep the children quiet while her father wrote his sermon.

Mrs. Millington was bustling about the hall, noisily interviewing the payers of club money for the week, and her quick, remonstrant voice was quite audible. Whether her husband's selection of "The Blessings of Peace" as his subject had anything to do with that voice is an open question.

Betty yawned capacious twice. "Oh, dear me, Berry, how I wish something would happen. I am simply sick of going on in the dismal old humdrum fashion. I wish we had lived in the Middle Ages, when there always seemed to be tournaments, or in

those old-fashioned summers when it was fine all day long. When I was a small child I thought we should do all manner of grand things when we were grown up. You are grown up, but, as far as I can see, it hasn't made the faintest difference."

Beryl sighed. She could not enter into explanations with Betty, but she knew that there was a difference, and that it was painful. Mrs. Bunting's ball had been less of an era in her life than the morning that succeeded it, and she had been wiser and a little sadder since.

"I thought you would have liked to write at your story," she said mildly, as she threaded her needle.

"I shall never get on with it again," said Betty very tragically, "for I've burnt 'Etheldreda; or, The Wraith's Revenge,' burnt every chapter of it."

"My dear Betty, I should quite as soon have thought of your burning yourself."

"This morning, when you were doing the church vases, mamma caught me. I had a splendid idea, and in the middle of my old sums—ugh! how I hate sums!—just did a page or two. The wicked duke was going to carry off Etheldreda at the ball, and the family ghost met him, and held up his skeleton arm and said 'Beware!' You have no idea how creepy it was—a nice, damp old passage, plenty of bats and crawly newts. Well, mamma came behind

me, and read a bit over my shoulder. I call it a most dishonorable thing for anybody to do. And she read aloud—and oh, how I did jump!—“ ‘Dastard, yield up my bride, and return to your boon companions.’ ” You know, Cyril de Vere, the hero, had come up. They always do in books. Mamma said, ‘What stuff is that, Elizabeth?’ and when I hear the word ‘Elizabeth,’ I know I’m in for it. ‘Is this another specimen of those very improper German plays I mean to speak to your father about?’ I couldn’t help it; I simply roared with laughter at the idea of ‘Etheldreda’ being by Schiller. Mamma was furious. When I told her I was writing a novel she said ‘Give it to me. I insist upon reading it.’ I couldn’t, so I tore it all to bits and burnt it. Perhaps in years to come, when I am a great authoress, I shall write that plot again. It was such a good one. I mean to be celebrated some day, Beryl. I should like to have enough money to buy Bevan a Large Copper for the collection. Why, I do believe it’s clearing. Oh, Berry, if it does, let us go for a long walk, and then I shan’t bother about poor, dear Etheldreda.”

It did clear, and about five o’clock, after a grumbling protest from Mrs. Millington that they were forever wasting their time out-of-doors, the two sisters went out into the clear, fresh air. They were

good walkers, and as the fields were very wet, they took their way along one of the pleasant, winding lanes, where the thick dust was laid and the foxgloves were standing stately in the hedgerows. This led to a broad expanse of common, where the tall bracken ferns made a gold-green fairy forest, which by-and-by the heather would empurple.

Betty's spirits soon rose, and in scrambling for inaccessible honeysuckle she utterly forgot the wicked duke. Beryl was quieter, but just as happy in her way, with that delicious sense of youth and well-being we only analyze and long after when it has gone forever.

She was prettier in her pink cotton and her wide straw hat than in her ball dress, Harold Buchanan decided as, returning from his rounds, he approached the sisters too absorbed in stretching their arms upward for the pale, prickly roses to notice his coming; but prettiest when she blushed and shook hands rather shyly.

"Let me help you. I am taller. I have got a knife, too," he said, not without a vague sense that he was a little unwise to linger. "Your hand is bleeding already."

"Oh, never mind. It is a thorn, I think; but it is nothing. I can easily get it out when I go home."

"Let me do it now. I always carry needles."

Beryl caught herself wondering who had made the neat little case he took out of his pocket, and which had, in fact, been an offering from a middle-aged nurse.

She held up her plump, brown hand like a child, and as Buchanan took it he noticed it was very small and soft. He was absurdly conscious of Betty's calm scrutiny, but in reality she was looking in quite another direction with her long-sighted gray eyes.

"I see a dog tearing along at such a pace," she remarked. "Why, it is Mrs. Farrant's Kismet, and it looks so strange. It will be close to us in a minute."

With one swift glance, Buchanan could have staked his life the animal was mad. No one who has once seen a mad dog is ever mistaken.

"Don't be frightened. I must shoot this dog as I did the other."

There was no time for reply, but Beryl turned as pale as death.

The poor creature rushed straight past them, turning neither to left nor right, and, as Buchanan fired, fell dead in a moment.

Betty had not changed color, but stood her ground resolutely, whilst Beryl hid her face in her hands. It was a solemn moment for all three, but when Buchanan moved towards the dead dog, Beryl caught him by the arm.

"Don't touch it. There might be danger for you," she exclaimed, with a fear for him overmastering every other sentiment. "Are you sure, quite sure, the poor thing is dead, and do you think he was really mad? I shall never forget his eyes."

"Yes he was mad," said Buchanan, leaning over the creature with a genuine pity. "But you were so brave, Beryl, when he was rushing along. Be more courageous now that the danger is over." He never noticed he had called her by her Christian name.

But Beryl was not brave, and had only restrained herself by a very great effort. She trembled and turned aside.

There was no one at hand, and the road was a lonely one, so that even the report of the revolver had probably passed unnoticed.

Buchanan scarcely observed the girls, for it was necessary for him to resolve upon action. The dog that had bitten Adrian Sarel was mad. It was essential that he should never know this horrible fact. The slight wound had been immediately cauterized. There was probably no danger at all, unless it should be created by alarm, acting on a sensitive, highly wrought nature. The thing must be kept an inviolate secret, but was that possible when it was shared by two girls?

A glance at Betty, perfectly cool and collected, and

trying to reassure her sister, decided him. She had kept the story of the satin shoes to herself. She would be silent in this matter. And as to Beryl, she would do what he told her; of that he was positive, though he did not ask himself why.

"I am going to beg you young ladies to do me a favor, and a difficult one," he began in his ordinary voice. "I want to bury this poor dog here upon the common, and never to let any person know either that he is dead or that I shot him. Mrs. Farrant believes he is lost, but I have reason, a very weighty reason, for wishing no one to hear the real facts. It is important, and I should fear to trust most people, but not you."

Beryl was silent, but Betty, with her quicker intelligence and her ready imagination, rushed to a conclusion that was the true one.

"Take this to dig with," she began, holding out a small trowel she had brought with her to get ferns for her garden. "We both promise, and no Millington ever breaks a promise. I can guess the rest. That dog has bitten some one. But you need not be afraid of us. We are father's daughters, not mamma's."

"Thank you, Betty." said Buchanan, grasping the dirty hand held out so frankly, and finding a sort of relief in having a sharer of even part of his secret.

"You are wonderfully quick. Kismet has bitten some one, but very slightly, and the wound was cauterized directly. That person ought never to know the dog was mad."

He took up the beautiful dead creature, and walked on to the common, where the gravel soil would make it particularly easy to bury it. Betty followed him, but as he laid it on the sweet-scented, thymy turf, they heard a little startled cry. It was from Beryl, who had fainted for the first time in her life, and was lying by the grassy road side unconscious.

They were both beside her in a moment, and in another she opened her startled blue eyes, to find Betty supporting her head and Buchanan leaning over her, sprinkling a little water from an adjacent spring on her face.

"Oh, how silly I am. What was it? Where am I?" she began when consciousness returned. "Ah, I remember it all now. It is you who were bitten by that terrible dog, and you may die."

She did not know what her incoherent words meant, but her listener did. His heart beat with a sense that something strangely natural had happened, and there was genuine feeling in his voice when he answered, "Thank God, it was not I."

He could not trust himself to speak just then. An awed inner consciousness assured him that it was

himself who was the central figure in this sweet young girl's pure dreams and fancies. He felt ashamed to know what was unknown to her, and for this first time he wished that circumstance did not so emphatically debar any thought of marriage, except as a mere money bargain.

It was characteristic of his nature that Beryl's weakness touched him more than the courage of her younger sister aroused his admiration.

As soon as Beryl had revived Betty helped him to bury Kismet, with an experience born of melancholy and frequent interments in the pets' cemetery of the rectory garden.

Beryl was almost well by the time they had finished. She had no idea what she had revealed, or why her relief and thanksgiving should be so fervent. She was not curious to know who had been bitten. First love is about the most selfish thing on earth, and directly she had heard Harold Buchanan was unscathed, even her usual ready sympathy with any unfortunate person was utterly forgotten.

He walked part of the way back with them, but, rather to the relief of both, made an excuse for stopping at a cottage before they entered the village. He had no desire to face Mrs. Millington at any time, but less so than ever just now. She would come before his imagination in the guise of mother-in-law—

not for himself, of course; that was hopelessly impossible and unlikely. But she was certainly a most tedious woman, and even in his grave and anxious thoughts of the events of this eventful day she still obtruded herself.

Beryl was quite herself again as they walked through the rosy glow of the sunset. She only wanted to be quiet, and for once Betty fell in very aptly with her mood.

That active brain was too busy even for words, but as they neared the rectory she said with determination, "'Etheldreda' was mere bosh. I am glad I burnt her. By-and-by I will write a real story about all this. Not for years, you know. I shall make Doctor Buchanan the hero—much better than just a fancy person like Cyril de Vere."

Beryl was inattentive, but Betty finished in her own thoughts, "And you shall be my heroine, only I won't tell you that. But it must be a pink satin, not a pink cotton."

CHAPTER X.

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW.

HEN a week elapsed without any sign that poor Kismet's fate was known or guessed, Harold Buchanan breathed more freely. It was as well that he was very busy, otherwise even his wholesome nature might have brooded morbidly over the case of Adrian Sarel. He saw him daily, and noticed with relief that he looked well and was rather more animated than usual.

Isabel had taken immediate alarm at the idea of a nurse, and had promised to spare herself—the first promise she had ever broken in her life.

The weather was hot, and the fever ran high with Randie. The kind-hearted young doctor was very anxious to spare the mother one sacrifice, but at last he felt he must urge it. He put his hand gently on the head of the unconscious child. "I am afraid we ought to cut off these curls," he said with evident reluctance.

Isabel turned to him with an imploring glance. Just for a moment it seemed as if she could not con-

sent; the next, she answered him, with only a slight tremor in her voice, "If you think it will be best; only will you hold him up while I do it myself. No one else must touch him."

She took up a pair of scissors at once, after telling Randie, who only smiled faintly. There was something so far-away in that smile that to poor Isabel it brought a chilling fear that to the child of her heart nothing earthly mattered any longer. That there was danger for him, though Buchanan would scarcely admit it, she knew with every fibre of her being. Yet she clipped off the lovely golden curls that had been her joy and pride, and did not falter until her work was quite accomplished.

When the small shorn head was laid back upon the pillow, she looked up to the doctor with urgency of appeal. "You will not make me burn them?"

"No, no," said Buchanan hastily. "There are plenty of ways of making it quite safe for you to keep the pretty things. But they will soon grow again."

"If God spares him to me."

There was no rebellion against the divine decree, no impotent lamentation. "Thy will be done" was and had always been Isabel's religion. She clung to it now with all the tenacity of her steadfast soul. She had no time to deplore her darling's disfigurement.

A much harder duty lay before her—to induce Fay to have her heavy hair shortened. It was essential, but the childish coquette sobbed and cried pitifully. She had never lost consciousness, and indeed, had she been quieter and more tractable, would have suffered very little from the light attack of fever. Her chief discomfort was due to the effects of the bursts of angry tears, which were, however, much less frequent than at first.

She now hid her face in the pillow and refused to let Buchanan touch her. "I hate you, I hate you," she sobbed out. "You want to take away my hair. Papa wouldn't let you if he were here. He says I am his little picture-girl. Nobody will love me if I am ugly. Nobody ever does love ugly children."

"Pity 'tis 'tis true," thought Buchanan, almost losing patience, and wondering that Isabel was not irritated. He did not know that her longing to win the heart of this other wayward child was the chief emotion of her life just at present.

The poor girl found she dared not think too often or too much of Adrian. There were thoughts connected with him that unnerved her for her work of nurse. But to win little, wild Fay to love her truly was a goal worth long waiting and longer effort. In her husband's absence the children were all in all. They at least must cling to her, or how could she go on?

"Leave her to me, doctor, please," she said with gentle authority. "I will persuade her. We must not let her disturb Randie."

The little fellow had dropped asleep, and his face looked pitifully small without the clustering curls.

"I shall be out late to-night, Mrs. Sarel," said Buchanan, not wishing to alarm her, "and I think I had better look in again."

He gave her a few directions, and went away very sorrowful. Sickness and pain still touched him, as they always touch noble natures, in spite of familiarity, and the fear that Randie might die was uppermost in his thoughts.

Isabel did not immediately keep her promise with regard to Fay's hair, for, worn out by her struggles, the child fell asleep.

When Randie awoke, late in the evening, for the first time there was no recognition in his eyes for the mother who bent over him. He was awake, but there was no look of consciousness, and again his temperature had risen alarmingly.

"Aline, you must go for the doctor," said Isabel in terror, for she had sent the other servant on a necessary errand.

So she was quite alone with the two children. Fay was sleeping quietly. She could only watch and wait. She had no messenger to send to Adrian, for

whom in this supreme moment all her heart cried out.

Low on the wall hung a print of that Murillo Madonna with the Child that smiles down divinely from the walls of the Utuzzi. In that smile there is an answer to the doubter. Faith recognizes in a sudden rush of ecstasy that there was indeed One "who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven."

Isabel flung herself upon her knees before it. She wanted a definite symbol. She wanted to feel that her impassioned prayers were indeed addressed, not to a remote and awful Deity, but to One who can pity as well as aid. — We want neither God nor man alone in these supreme moments; only that union, that dual nature, that combines the omniscience of the Deity with the tender human compassion that no other form of religion has ever quite realized.

"Save him, save him, or, if it may not be, give me strength and patience."

Isabel did not know that she had spoken that prayer aloud, and that she had a listener. Fay roused herself to hear it, and to see her mother's piteous face raised to the picture she vaguely associated with Sundays. She was not a child who had been strongly impressed with religion, as are many even younger than she. Privately she feared God

because they said He could see her when she was naughty, and that was so often. She was also very much afraid of death.

She was fond of Randie because he let her tyrannize over him. The idea that he might die had never occurred to her. It now flashed across her as a dread possibility, and with it came a sudden rush of love for her mother. Papa could not have cared much about them, after all. He had gone away and—

“Oh, poor mamma; oh, dear mamma, come to Fay.”

The shrill childish voice came like an answer to the prayer itself. With her little daughter’s arms locked round her neck, her tears mingling with her own, Isabel felt a ray of sunlight had pierced the darkness of that dark hour.

“Darling mamma, don’t cry. You shall cut off all my hair, and I will be such a good girl. Randie won’t die; he can’t.”

“Hush, darling; let us ask God together to let him stay with us.”

Harold Buchanan paused reverently at the door rather than interrupt that prayer. It so rebuked the private doubts and scientific questionings that, after all, only troubled him very occasionally. He was not introspective. He was too much occupied with other people to imagine himself all-important. People who

are so perpetually busy with their own souls are very apt not to accomplish much definite work.

Isabel rose from her knees as he entered, but without any sort of embarrassment. Prayer was too natural a habit with her. She was rapt into another world, and her only present interest in this one centred in Randie's little bed.

Anxious hours followed, hours of which each moment seemed a day to Isabel. Randie talked incessantly and incoherently, and always in his delirium the name of "mother" was uppermost. Fay watched also, clasping her mother's hand, with a new gravity in the great, dark eyes that closed as the pink dawn flushed through the curtainless window.

A belated cuckoo called to the other birds to waken and enjoy the summer, and at last, just as the sun rose, the breathing of the child became quieter; the voice first sank to a whisper, and then was silent. He lay so still that for a dreadful instant Isabel thought the end had come.

"There will be a crisis when he wakes," said Buchanan. "While there is life there is hope."

And before the birds had finished their matins the faint hope was justified, and Randie awoke with his old sweet smile that sought the happy mother bending over him. The crisis had passed, and with extreme care he might recover.

Buchanan did not leave the house until the little patient slept again. Before he did so, he made Isabel promise to rest awhile after taking some food while Aline occupied her place.

Isabel obeyed him by drinking a cup of tea, but she could not rest. She was far too excited and too relieved. So she went out into the garden, where the white dew still glittered on the lawn, and the great clumps of queen lilies filled all the air with incense.

"Joy cometh in the morning." It was a glad world, and soon, very soon, her husband would be with her to share her thanksgiving. Buchanan had promised to go to Allaronde with the news, but Isabel forgot that Adrian would not have known of the danger until it was over.

Those terrible hours when Randie's life hung in the balance separated to-day from yesterday by a great gulf. She herself bore visible traces of the agony of the night watch. Such hours age more swiftly than happy, easy years, and in the golden sunshine she looked white and worn. Unselfish though she was, she fell into the universal error of expecting her husband to be in entire sympathy with her own mood. Years of experience ought to have taught her how very seldom he fell in with it, but just now she was too full of gratitude and joy to have any room in her heart for other emotions.

He did not, after all, come until later than she expected, having, for the first time, accompanied Philippa in her daily early ride. It was not the first time she had asked him to do so, for she knew that she never looked to such advantage as when on horseback. But, for an undefined reason, he had made his work the pretext for refusal. But now that incubus, "The Little Convalescent," had been despatched to the dealer, and "Sister Helen" could not elude his grasp because she was fixed on canvas, he had no valid excuse.

So they had gone out into the delicious freshness, and he had immediately perceived how fit a central figure she would make for an illustration to Browning's "Last Ride Together." She would have rejoiced if she could have guessed the thoughts that made him grave and abstracted.

Arthur Farrant, with his customary good-nature, had begged Adrian to make use of his horses; yet, since his marriage, he had not often felt sadder than when, from his window, he watched his handsome guest and his beautiful wife ride away under the branching trees. He had no thought of jealousy. He could trust her absolutely. But the memory of the sheer physical rapture he was never to feel again stung him with an aching sense of irreparable loss.

As it happened, Buchanan met them when they

were returning, so, as they passed Lettice Close, Isabel, walking in the garden, just had a glimpse of Philippa, radiant and animated with the exercise and air. Philippa knew better than to interrupt a *tête-à-tête* between husband and wife, but as she went home she exulted in the contrast between herself and this weary-looking, white-faced woman, in her shabby dress.

Adrian was not altogether a large-minded man, and at this moment he felt the old vexation with Isabel for appearing at a disadvantage. But she was unconscious of his thought as she ran to meet him.

He put his arms round her and kissed her, and they sat down on a garden seat together. He was not very much moved by her history of all that had happened. She had no brilliant conversational powers, and no ability to tell a story otherwise than very simply.

If Adrian could have seen her praying in her despair while her child lay dying, as she thought, he would have been so struck by the poignant pathos of the situation that he would have been responsive to enthusiasm. As it was, he expressed his pleasure in the fact that Randie was out of danger with a certain calmness that chilled her a little.

"And what have you been doing?" she ended.

"Oh, painting, as usual. I have sent off the 'Convalescent,' so there will be funds for the doctor."

He could not tell her anything about "Sister Helen." She had never heard of the poem if she had heard of Rossetti, he decided.

"And Mr. and Mrs. Farrant, are they nice to you, and do they make you comfortable? I am always so afraid you will not be looked after."

The contrast between the stately luxury of Allaronde and the shabbiness of Lettice Close that he so disliked, made his answer sound indifferent. "Oh, yes, they are pleasant people, but I shall be glad to get back." It was not true, but just for the moment he fancied it was, and she believed it.

"All being well, it may not be very long before I am able to take the children to Eastbourne, but it would be very dreary for you to be here alone. I was hoping that Mrs. Farrant's portrait might have kept you there till I came back."

"A little solitude is no bad thing for a painter, Belle, and I have had nearly enough society for the present. I feel rather fagged. I think I want to be quiet, and less on the strain to be amusing. Poor Farrant is not a lively companion."

Isabel looked anxious. "Don't work too hard, dearest. If our darlings are well soon, I shall not

stay away an hour longer than is necessary. I want you so."

He felt the tenderness of her appeal, but he could only respond to it by a caress that was merely given because it seemed the easiest answer. She was wearisome to him, because he could not talk to her of the more exciting interests that filled his inner life.

But he sent loving messages to both children, and a pretty fairy tale in pictures for Fay, which kept her radiant. She had borne the cutting of her hair with heroism, and was much comforted by Aline's assurance that she would be *très gentille* with her short, dark curls.

Randie recovered with the wonderful, elastic rapidity seen only in the very young. A week later Isabel could scarcely believe that the danger had been so recent. Fay was a source of delight to her. All her capricious affection was now centred on her mother. She no longer asked for "papa," but was full of eager anticipation of the joys of Eastbourne, the sea, the beach, and the shells.

The Millingtons had sent constant inquiries for the little patients, and more than once Beryl had met Harold Buchanan at the door. Those were red-letter days for her, but as she never mentioned these meetings, even Betty was not hopeful of any sequel

to the exciting episode that had permanently dethroned Cyril de Vere from his post of hero.

The secret between them made a wonderful difference, and gradually Buchanan came to feel a chill of disappointment if he did not catch a glimpse of the little figure that was so often to be seen among the cottages.

Mrs. Millington was not, as she often said, one who ever shirked an unpleasant duty. Indeed, she constantly put things before herself in the light of duties, for the pleasure of doing them, that would have been better left undone.

She had taken a dislike to Adrian Sarel, and vented it in a free indulgence of speculations why he remained so long at Allaronde. Her husband annoyed her by his obstinate lack of interest in conjectures that made Beryl silently indignant. After discussing the matter with one or two intimates, she came to a decision that "some one" ought to speak, not to Mrs. Farrant, of whom she was secretly not a little in awe, but to that stupid Mrs. Sarel.

Who so fit a mentor as the wife of the vicar of the parish? She wrote a gracious note to Isabel, regretting that danger of infection debarred them from meeting at the vicarage, but saying that she would enjoy a chat with her in the garden if she could spare half an hour. Isabel, of course, read nothing between

the lines, and was not sorry to have an opportunity of expressing her gratitude for Beryl's inquiries.

Mrs. Millington made her appearance next day in a shot-silk visiting dress that rustled aggressively, and the two sat down on the seat where Isabel had last been with her husband.

"I am glad to hear your children are recovering," she began, "but it is necessary I should tell you that this visit is not a visit of inquiry for them. You are young still."

Isabel smiled a little. She did not feel so.

"And quite a stranger here, I believe."

Isabel assented rather wonderingly.

"You have no friend to advise you in any difficulties, so I determined to come to you."

Mrs. Millington said this very meaningly, but her listener only looked more and more puzzled and waited to hear further.

"It is a painful subject, and I am quite at a loss how to refer to it," continued Mrs. Millington, shaking her head until the beads on her mantle rattled. "But oh, my dear Mrs. Sarel, even in Northbent there are evil tongues, and they are busy."

"Scarcely with my concerns, I think, Mrs. Millington," said Isabel gently.

"Yes, with yours, or rather those of your husband. Surely it is a strange thing that he should be away

from home all this time, and Mrs. Farrant is so very handsome that——”

“Stop!” There was stern anger in the single word that scared even Mrs. Millington for a moment. Isabel sprang up and stood before her with a face of horrified amazement and contempt that was unexpected enough.

“I let you speak because you are older than I,” she exclaimed, “but I will not hear another word. Do you suppose that I cannot trust my husband, the father of my children, to be away a few weeks without insulting the most honorable man that ever lived with such bare suspicions as those? Mrs. Farrant saved my little daughter’s life, and is this how you wish me to repay her—by listening to the silly scandals of those who have no object in their empty lives except to make others miserable by their slanders?”

“Really, Mrs. Sarel, you show a temper you should learn to control. After all, what have I said?”

“What you will never repeat in my presence. You have no children of your own. You do not know their power to unite a husband and wife.”

“Mark my words, Mrs. Sarel; you will be sorry you forgot yourself like this,” said Mrs. Millington with an assumption of dignity. “The time will come when you may want a friend. You will never find one in me.”

She hurried out, clicking the little garden gate sharply as she did so.

Fay was allowed out-of-doors now, and had been playing on the other side of the garden. She ran up with a great bunch of flowers in her hands. "Mamma, darling, I picked these for you. See, aren't the sweet peas pretty?"

The perfume seemed suddenly to calm Isabel. Why should she care what outsiders did and said, when those in her own little world were so loyal and true to her?

This was the moment when all the beauty and worth of her conquest of Fay's childish heart made itself most keenly felt. Fay had learnt to love her so well, and as she pressed her fresh kisses against her mother's pale cheek, Isabel's anger died away, and a sweet sense of peace returned.

Mrs. Millington neither looked nor felt as jaunty as usual as she walked along the dusty road. She informed Beryl that evening that she considered Mrs. Sarel a most undesirable person, and that she was quite sorry she had called.

"Which," commented Betty privately, "means that Mrs. Sarel didn't bow down to mamma's opinions."

And, as usual, Betty was more or less right.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CUP OF CIRCE.

ARTHUR FARRANT was delighted with his wife's portrait. It was a conscientious piece of work, and very like the beautiful original it disappointed. It was almost completed when Buchanan fixed a day for the children to go to Eastbourne, about a fortnight after Mrs. Millington's unwelcome visit to Isabel.

Adrian had yielded to persuasion, and stayed on at Allaronde, but he insisted that he should return to Lettice Close directly his family had left it, despite the comfortless presence of the painters and white-washers. He saw his wife daily in the garden, but each interview left him more and more dissatisfied.

Isabel had scorned to tell him of Mrs. Millington's visit and the vague allegations it hurt her to recall. Her nature was too reserved, and her deep love for Adrian was much too sacred to her to be expressed in words. It is only the thinner and poorer sentiments that can be discussed and analyzed. Yet she could not blind herself to the fact that he was changed

—moodier, more silent, and paler than he used to be. When two people habitually see each other every hour, a very short absence will sometimes cause a surprisingly wide gulf to open between them.

When a woman flings her whole heart at the feet of some man who cannot love her, when the pitiful word “unrequited” is written in her history, she is apt to think no pain can equal hers. The mourning widow, in the darkness of her first despair, can almost smile at such a delusion. Surely she, and no other, has drunk the cup of suffering to the dregs.

But it is to neither of these that “sorrow’s crown of sorrow” really belongs. It is to her who has once been loved, and finds the beloved object wearying of her. Death, falsehood, indifference, these are as nothing compared to the anguish of the knowledge that the fire of passion has utterly burned out.

Isabel was seldom conscious that Adrian was living in a world of his own. His mere presence satisfied and occupied her. Now she felt that the current of their lives was indeed drifting apart, and tried resolutely to thrust away a growing terror lest, after all, Philippa’s hand might be in all this.

Another vexation was experienced by Adrian the first time he saw Fay. The child was looking very pretty with her little, thin face, fast regaining its roses, set in short curls; but, capricious as ever, she

had almost forgotten him in her new enthusiasm for her mother.

"You never sat by me, papa; you never held my head when it ached. I cried for you at first, but you never came."

That was her greeting, and then she chattered on about the sea and the shells, and did not seem to care to play with him and cling about him as of old. Her heart had only room for one idol at a time, and her father had fallen from his pedestal.

Randie, though still very weak, was now allowed to be carried out into the sunshine for a few moments. He smiled at his father, but it was not the same smile with which he looked up at the mother round whose neck his thin arm was flung.

So the children, in all innocence, did their share to strengthen the growing estrangement between the two. It is seldom one great event that causes such ruptures; rather a sequence of trifles which are only gradually and very slowly perceived.

Each faintly wronged the other in thought. Adrian believed that Isabel had in a measure alienated Fay from him. Isabel, making her life-long mistake of inability to realize that in all things his art came first, connected the change in him with Philippa Farrant's influence. Both were far from the truth. Adrian's thoughts were perpetually with

his picture. Visions of a great success alternated with the old chilling doubts and fears.

The last meeting before their departure was not a happy one to him, though Isabel was greatly comforted by the warmth of his parting kiss and words. She had no idea that it had cost him an effort to be affectionate, or that he was feverishly anxious to shut himself up in the empty cottage, and work absolutely undisturbed at the picture.

She was to take the children to Eastbourne next morning, with the faithful Aline, and felt like a child herself at the prospect of the little holiday. Their quarantine was not strictly at an end, but the childless old people who were so eager to welcome them had no fears.

Philippa had in vain tried her utmost to persuade Sarel to continue at Allaronde until his wife's return, making the last touches of the portrait the excuse to her husband, but urging "Sister Helen" as a much more cogent reason to the artist himself. She was hurt and piqued to a degree that surprised her by his determination to leave, and, while he was at Lettice Close, went down to her favorite place among the woods to think and dream without fear of interruption.

Arthur had gone out in his chair, although the sky was dark and the air somewhat thundery. A storm

had been brooding all day, and there was a heavy stillness. It was not like that exquisite afternoon in the first fresh glory of summer, when she had heard little Fay singing on her father's shoulder. The fox-gloves were gone, the birds silent, and the hedges showed only a few dull purple nightshade flowers in the place of the tender loveliness of the June roses.

There are days toward the end of July when it is felt that nature has by no means redeemed the promise of May. The foliage is thick and rather sombre, the fruit still green and uninteresting. There is neither the gladness of spring, with its parquetry of bluebells and dancing daffodils, nor the flashing splendors of the changing autumn tints. The busy worker is idle and languid over her siesta, and there is a sense of accomplishment much less fascinating than the incompleteness of the earlier months.

It was some time since Philippa had been alone with her old weary distaste for her life, but to-day it was strong upon her, nor did she try very hard to resist the overwhelming melancholy that possessed her. She made a faint effort to be cynical over her own depression, and only succeeded in becoming sad. To think we know that all is vanity is not in the least a consolation.

Philippa's thoughts turned to her portrait and to its painter. It had disappointed her acutely. She

had lately seen something new in her own face, her own eyes, and she had relied upon finding this added charm in the portrait. It was not there, therefore she might infer that Adrian could not see it. After all, he did not really understand her, did not know how she admired him, believed in him.

Lately he had avoided the subject of "Sister Helen" with a sort of shyness. If she had been a real woman and he had loved her, he could scarcely have been more reticent. The intimacy between them had lessened instead of increased. Her friend, as she had dreamed him, was to leave her to-morrow. He had no wish to stay. He would take with his picture all he had wanted of her, and he denied her even the recompense of watching it grow into perfection. Men were all alike, she thought with a bitterness that wronged the husband who was so true to her.

To the poet, the painter, the writer, a woman is nothing but a subject. If she is beautiful, she may serve as a model. If she is tender and loving, she may inspire a tinkle of rhyme or a few chapters of his novel.

There was the sudden heavy splash of a few great, ominous raindrops upon the leaves above her head, but Philippa did not heed them. A voice within her was asking her a question, and demanding, insisting

upon, an answer. What was this man to her, that he usurped all her thoughts? What was it that had made the past weeks so golden, the future so gray of aspect? What was his success, his failure, to her?

There was a blinding flash of lightning, followed by a low, deep roll of thunder. Nearer and nearer it came, until it seemed to crash just above her. A storm always filled her with a certain sense of exultation. Fear she did not know.

She stood quite still, for louder than the thunder there had sounded in her heart those three words of self-surrender every woman hears once in her lifetime. She may speak them to herself alone in proud triumph, in timid happiness, or with the pang of utter hopelessness; but she is not indeed a woman until that hour of keenest joy or sharpest torment is overpast.

"I love him." For a few moments, whilst the storm raged round her, she whispered it over and over again. Standing alone and utterly absorbed she forgot Arthur, forgot that she was a wife, and only exulted in the knowledge that at last, when it might well have seemed too late, love had come to her. She was ready to admit it, to glory in it, not to look at it in its true, its repulsive light.

The voices of honor and duty were silent. Her heart and conscience were for the time emptied of

everything except this burning, delicious pain, this rapturous certainty that no one except herself had ever loved as she did. It was not a mere vulgar preference, she said to herself proudly. All her life she had longed to do some service to art. Here it lay ready to hand. Adrian was cramped, lonely, misunderstood.

She was so wrought up by the sudden strength of this wild passion that had been dormant until then that she looked forward fearlessly and unhesitatingly to taking the great step from which she had once before receded with a certain terror. She could dare anything, do anything now. Fear she would never know again, could she once accomplish her heart's desire.

It might be that Adrian felt as she did, that the same magic suddenness of knowledge might come to him also. If he left his mean surroundings, and came away, with her fortune to make his way easy, and her love to heap up a measure of joy unknown before, she might give the world a great painter. She magnified the possibilities of his talent till it became genius.

So distorted were Philippa's conceptions that she regarded the new self of this magnificent future with admiration. It was not for herself that she proposed to leave her husband. It was for the sake of art. It

is so easy to make the blackest sin look white when desire points the way.

Except those first few drops, no rain had fallen, and the heat was intense. The thirsty earth was waiting for its refreshment. That solemn childish aith that the thunder is the awful voice of the Deity did not revert to this woman, who, after dreaming all her life, had suddenly awakened, reckless of all consequences.

She would gladly have prolonged this hour of revelation but for the thought that by this time Adrian might have come back. A very definite action must be taken that evening, and surely, surely she had power enough at least to keep him beside her.

Just as she reached the house the rain fell in torrents. It soaked Adrian, who was returning from Lettice Close, and added to the depression that for the last few days had overwhelmed him. He was jealous and sensitive, and Fay's childish indifference had hurt him. She had been his greatest pleasure at home, and now she seemed to have forgotten her love. Children were, after all, unsatisfactory, he decided.

And then he harked back to the old, ever-recurrent sense that fame was the only goal worth a man's struggle. If he had but means to work out his own conceptions slowly and lovingly! As it was, the

payment for the portrait would be swamped in the doctor's bill, in a hundred other trifling debts. If he did his duty he would at once begin a series of "pot-boilers"—hateful phrase! It was to him hard, when easy moneyed leisure was granted to so many to be squandered in mere idleness, that he should not have it at his command for the labor in which he delighted.

Circumstances was curiously favorable to Philippa's wish that they two might be alone. The storm had prostrated her husband with one of his terrible headaches, and as she was dressing he sent her a message to say that he could not dine that evening.

Their last together? or but the prologue to a long vista of days, of years? No; she would not look forward.

She put on a dress which, in its severity, had some suggestive likeness to the draperies that clothed "Sister Helen," but, with an impulse she did not seek to define, she wore none of her usual jewels. She was a little pale, but her pallor merely gave a softness to her beauty that was not lost upon Adrian when she entered the room.

Conversation was difficult at dinner, and eating was but a pretence with both. They had been alone once or twice before, but until to-day Philippa had been bright and animated, a perfect hostess.

"I am going into the studio," she said as she rose. "I thought I should like to have a last look at the picture before you packed it."

When Adrian joined her ten minutes later, there was no lamp in the room; only the moon, which shone out broad and serene after the storm, and streamed through the open window.

She was standing beside the great easel, looking down eagerly to the outlined face so like her own in feature. But in the place of the despair and set resolution in the picture, the living, breathing woman, so much lovelier, had her eyes bright with unshed tears.

"I am saying good-by to art, you see," she began, turning toward him with that new, dangerous softness of manner. "When you are gone, I shall not have the delight of watching the visions of your brain grow visible. It has been a delight that was half a pain. Ah, I envy you with all my heart—I, who can do nothing."

Adrian smiled bitterly. "It is pretty to hear you say so, but it sounds an irony. My life has been only a long disappointment. To you, with your lofty ideals, it is sordid to confess that art cannot flourish on a crust. No; I am a poor man, and I have no right to think of painting anything above the level of the 'Convalescent.' I am a failure."

"You are unhappy. I am unhappy too. And yet there is happiness enough in the world, if we could but grasp it."

"Unhappy? You? With everything a woman most desires, wealth, beauty, and a husband who worships you, your lines have been cast in very pleasant places, different enough from the thorny paths we others walk in." He had never spoken so openly before; but then he had never felt so overwrought, so hopeless.

"I tried to be your friend, and you repulsed me," she said in a low, stifled voice.

"I? I have not so many friends that I could afford such churlishness." He was almost rough, yet she was not repelled.

"I asked you to stay, but you would not; yet when you asked a favor, I granted it so gladly."

"You have been very good to me, much better than I deserve. It is not often a penniless artist has so gracious a patroness," he replied slowly.

Philippa winced. "Do not use that hateful word. Say rather that you honor me by making me your model. I could do more, much more, if only you would not go. Tell me the truth; is it your wife's wish?"

"My wife? She knows nothing, cares nothing about pictures."

Still absorbed in his own dream, he had no suspicion of her meaning. To his wonder and pain, she made no answer, but, sinking down upon a sofa, hid her face in her hands. He had always had a shrinking from seeing a woman in tears, but Philippa's customary repose and reserve gave this feeling an added acuteness.

"What have I done?" he asked.

There was a compassion in his voice she took for tenderness, and it thrilled her whole being. She did not reply. She wanted to hear him speak in that tone again, and he continued, hurriedly and more coldly, "If I have vexed you in any way, let me beg for forgiveness. You are unnerved by the storm."

Then she looked up again—an eloquent look, full of love and longing. Adrian would not have been a man, far less an artist, if his pulses had not quickened. He did not love her; but though there was no love in the eyes that met but did not answer her own, there was admiration, and she took it for something other and more precious.

Carried away by her own emotion, exquisite in the flattering moonlight, she staked her all in one desperate appeal. She put her hand upon his arm, and whispered, "You have done nothing, Adrian. But I have learnt to love you."

He stepped back with a white, startled face,

shaken roughly from his reveries, and utterly at a loss for words that could express the inexpressible.

She went on quickly, persuasively, with an eloquence that surprised herself, "You think me mad, wicked, but I know you. I alone understand you. I know you are a genius, not to be governed by the laws that govern the rest of the world. I would give up all to follow you, to be with you. Your wife——"

"Silence!" Adrian spoke sternly, harshly. That word had been a spell to conjure him back to reality, to prove to him that he was not dreaming. "Do not dare to name her," he went on. "Can you suppose that I am as ready to be false to her as you to your unhappy husband? I am no saint, but, thank God, I have been true to the woman I vowed to love at the altar."

"You never loved her. You have no heart, or you would pity my weakness. Think what it is to have been bound all the years to one you cannot even honor. I married Arthur Farrant from compassion. I never lived until I knew you, never even thought I loved until you were beside me. You are misunderstood, and you are wasting your great gifts. I have what the world calls wealth, nothing else, and I am miserable."

Again she hid her face, and the tears fell fast.

She was so beautiful, and he so easily swayed by passing impulse. Just for an instant there flashed across him a vision of himself, away from all his petty troubles, living in an atmosphere of art and beauty. It faded, and gave place to nobler instincts. Philippa, in her humiliation, could have borne any punishment better than the cold indifference he strove to assume more successfully than he imagined.

"There is no such thing as happiness, I think," he added. "To-morrow I shall go my way, and you will soon forget. Your duty will—"

"Not that hateful word. The Adrian Sarel I have known is no preacher of impossibilities. Tell me to endure, or to suffer in silence, as I must now; you scorn me, repulse me; but do not talk of duty."

There was a despair in her voice that touched him to relent a little, though it did not shake his fixed resolution.

"We must part," he said slowly. "But I too shall find it hard to forget."

"Forget my madness," she retorted quickly. "Let us be as we were—friends. Heaven knows I need a friend bitterly enough."

It is always the woman who proposes these impossible courses. Adrian did not perceive the quick subterfuge that was still to connect them. He was struck with the pathos of the fate that made an un-

known, unsuccessful artist so much in the life of such a woman as Philippa Farrant.

He took her hand, and touched it with his lips. Without another syllable of farewell, she left him to muse alone for hours beside the unfinished picture.

Very early next day he left Allaronde, but it was with a sense that the most exciting scene in his life drama had been played.

Philippa did not shrink from the remembrance of that night as one of her proud temperament might have been expected to shrink. She had been precipitate with her desperate confession, but she was not despairing. Adrian's very anger gave her hope that he found it a battle to put aside the gift she had cast at his feet. Humility is an essential part of a great passion. At last self had ceased to be the first object in life to Philippa. Love had already cast out pride.

CHAPTER XII.

MAN PROPOSES.

WHEN Mrs. Millington had decided that the curate might be desirable as a husband for Beryl, she had not reckoned without her host. Her experienced eye had perceived that, as far as extreme shyness would permit, the Reverend Abel Hertford was in love with her step-daughter.

“When poor, dear father began to keep a curate, he really might have got a better article for the same money,” had been Betty’s verdict upon the newcomer, nor had a year’s intimacy at all altered her opinion or increased her respect.

He was a very quiet youth, whose only idea of dissipation was a tournament at the British Chess Club, whose chief delight the working out of problems of his beloved game. He never played chess in Lent, and what the relinquishment of this harmless indulgence cost him no one knew but himself. He was conscientious and a gentleman, though of insignificant aspect.

Beryl pitied him for his awkwardness and silence,

and entertained him very kindly when he came to the vicarage. He was not in the least inclined to view life from any worldly-wise standpoint, and he fell in love with her a long time before Mrs. Millington had given up hope of Harold Buchanan.

When, therefore, that astute lady embarked in a series of small tennis parties, and constantly pressed Mr. Hertford to drop in for supper, the poor fellow stepped into a fool's paradise. He was a wretched classic, and therefore a weariness to Mr. Millington, who, however, never interfered with any social arrangements, and bore patiently with the young man's presence.

Mrs. Millington gave him abundant encouragement, and Beryl, absorbed in her own private dreams, was not observant of this. She had never confessed to herself that there was only one man in the world for her, but a really astute woman might easily have read the fact in her calm indifference to all others.

Betty alone watched what to her was a farcical comedy with unfailing interest and amusement. The boys always called the Reverend Abel "the White Knight," because they considered he resembled the unappreciated bard in "Through the Looking Glass."

The holidays were close at hand, to Betty's rapture. The boys were her idols, and she looked for-

ward with ecstasy to long days in the woods, long evenings out sugaring in the churchyard or the plantations. There is no period in life that looks quite as long as the summer holidays before they have actually begun, when we are still at school. But to Betty the last week before them was an eternity, and her only really happy moment was when, each evening, she could scratch off the past day from her special calendar.

"Mamma has become quite mad about 'the White Knight,'" she wrote confidentially to Bevan, "and if you can't hit upon some plan for scaring him away, we shan't have any fun."

Bevan's inventive brain was equal to the task, but, luckily for his intended victim, his carefully made schemes went agley, for an unforeseen and to him unknown reason.

Spurred on by Mrs. Millington in many *tête-à-têtes* with that energetic lady, the curate very suddenly and clumsily proposed to Beryl.

They were standing under the big pear tree, and the sunset cast an unbecoming glow on his coppery head and the spectacles which, in his excitement, he had tilted up in a manner that was highly quaint. He was Beryl's first lover, but she could not help seeing that he looked very ridiculous, in spite of her surprise and fright. For when the fateful and most

unexpected words were actually spoken, she felt a decided inclination to run away.

They were a nervous couple. The curate was amazed at his own audacity, and Beryl was perturbed and distressed. Something made her even more tender-hearted than usual, and she spoke her bashful though decided refusal very gently.

He had never loved her so well as when he went back to his solitary lodgings. He got out his chess board after the meal he could not eat. But he failed to find any consolation even there.

Mrs. Millington had been holding her mothers' meeting as usual on that afternoon, and though the blinds of the dining-room, where it was held, were drawn down, to exclude the sun, the familiar drone of the concluding hymn came out to Beryl as she sat down on a garden seat to think over this wonderful occurrence. She knew that she had but a few moments to herself, and felt thankful for even the briefest time in which to collect her thoughts.

Of course, no one must guess what had occurred, she decided innocently. Poor Mr. Hertford should not be laughed at by the boys. He had told her he was going away for his annual holiday. He would be absent a month, and by the end of that time he would probably have forgotten all about her. This was her comfortable conclusion.

Luckily, the hymn was a long one, and Mrs. Millington had a scolding to administer after it.

Betty, with the twins as most willing if incompetent coadjutors, had been watering vigorously a little earlier. It was a beautiful garden, in spite of the old adage about too many cooks. The whole family gardened as best they could. Beryl knew every plant in it, and now the mignonette she had sown and the heliotropes she had nursed were testifying their gratitude in the subtle flower language we call perfume. There were hedges of sweet peas, thick-set with fluttering treasures of purple and rose pink, and there were the heavy-headed clove carnations that never flourish unless they are much tended and much loved.

By the time Mrs. Millington had finished and come bustling into the fragrant air, it had exercised its peaceful influence, and Beryl was knitting as serenely as if nothing had happened.

"I thought Mr. Hertford was here," began her stepmother.

"So he was, but he has gone," answered Beryl with an effort to be collected.

"What did he come for?" asked Mrs. Millington pointedly.

"I suppose he came to call."

"Now, Beryl," said her stepmother, "don't prevari-

cate. Mr. Hertford has never called before without staying for tea. I know well enough he came for something else. Come, tell me all about it. I am not angry. On the contrary, I am very well pleased to find you have not forgotten what I said on the day after Mrs. Bunting's ball. Ah, Beryl, you see I was quite right when I said you were old enough to be married."

Mrs. Millington spoke with a sort of cumbrous playfulness, for she was simply delighted with this eligible opportunity of proving that she had seen it all from the very first. To say "I told you so" is one of the chief pleasures of existence to minds of certain calibre.

Beryl saw at once that her wisest course was to state the truth quite simply. It had, to her, been so impossible to think of marrying the curate, that it had not dawned upon her that any one could fail to share her opinion. Modesty and kindness had made her wish to keep this secret, but it was not to be.

She spoke as gently as usual, but with a new touch of girlish dignity. "I think, mamma, you are making a great mistake. Mr. Hertford asked me to marry him, but of course I refused."

"You refused? And may I ask why?"

Though she would have died rather than confess it, she had herself never received an offer until the

happy day that had assured her she should reign in the vicarage. Deep in her heart lay the masculine conviction that all women married directly they got the chance of doing so. There was, therefore, a note of genuine surprise as well as curiosity in her question.

Beryl's cheeks flushed, but she answered bravely and briefly, "Because I did not care for him and never could."

Mrs. Millington was desperately anxious to get rid of Beryl. There was a silent rebuke in her look, a silent reproach in her eyes, at certain of her doings that galled her. She was aware that Beryl talked constantly of their dead mother to the younger ones, and fancied that if she were out of the house, her own influence might be paramount.

"Really, Beryl, you are ridiculous, and talk like some silly, sentimental schoolgirl. Let me tell you that you are getting on. You will be nineteen very soon, and this is probably the only chance you will ever have. I am quite aware that Mr. Hertford is a poor man, but he has expectations, as I happen to know. It was most presumptuous of you to dismiss him in such a summary fashion, and if I were not fortunately at hand to put matters upon a better footing, you would have cause to regret it all your days."

"I have always been obedient to you, mamma,"

broke in Beryl, keeping her indignation in check with an effort, "but this is a matter in which I must judge for myself alone. I cannot marry Mr. Hertford, because, as I said before, I do not love him."

This outburst from one usually so gentle was a disagreeable shock to her stepmother. The ignorant always crave for dominion, and to dictate was one of Mrs. Millington's chief pleasures. Beryl looked and spoke with a touch of womanly determination that was quite new, but she was not going to yield this point without a struggle.

"You are speaking in a way that is quite indecorous," she rejoined with tartness. "You know nothing about it. Properly engaged, you would very soon become as fond of Abel as there was any necessity for you to be. Only last Sunday you gave your class a lesson on duty. Practise what you preach, Beryl, and do not add to your father's worries by being so silly and so obstinate."

Whilst Mrs. Millington spoke, something had flashed across Beryl's mind that made her adamant, and caused her usual shyness to vanish.

"It is not my duty," she said very boldly. "It could not be right for me to marry like that. I never will. You made me very miserable once before, mamma, when you talked of this. Please do not say anything more."

At this juncture they were interrupted, much to Mrs. Millington's annoyance; but Beryl had made up her mind how she could put an end to the affair. She had refused to go to her father about that trivial matter of the satin shoes, but this was different. Busy or not, she must make him her ally.

Mr. Millington was, as usual, sitting by the study window. He looked perfectly contented, and held a vellum-covered volume of an obscure Greek commentary in his hand. Beryl was very loth to interrupt his evidently happy studies. She wondered a little wistfully if he had observed that she had carefully dusted and arranged his books and papers, or noticed the little blue pot of pinks and sweetbriar upon the writing table.

The vicar started as the door opened gently. He was often conscience-stricken concerning his absorption in unprofitable study. He loved to think and write, and deduce his own not particularly new or important conclusions from all this. Vague and dreamy was often his performance of parish duties in consequence. That intense boy's love for Alice Coventry had led him in the wrong groove for the rest of his life.

He was unfitted for the cares of a parish and a family. He looked as if he belonged to a college cloister instead of a large, bustling household. He

roused himself now with a strong effort, and tried to bring his mind a few centuries forward.

"Oh, Beryl, my dear, what is it you want?"

His eyes were far away, but she had no alternative but to tell her story whilst she had the opportunity.

She told it with a pretty, girlish hesitation, but ended with a loving entreaty that effectually touched her hearer: "Father, dear, you know I would do anything for you. For your sake I have always tried to be obedient to mamma. I never want to trouble you with my own little affairs; but I know you will be on my side in this. You will tell her I cannot marry Mr. Hertford, and beg her, beg her not to speak of it. It is so hard on him and on me."

She hid her face in her hands and cried softly. There was a new feeling in her heart that had dispelled all reserve.

Mr. Millington felt a shock of displeased surprise that already he should be in danger of losing this sweet daughter of his. He cared for her much more than she knew. Again to-day she looked very like the one woman he had loved. He spoke with a tenderness that was as welcome as unusual.

"My dear child, in my opinion you are far too young for marriage. Heaven forbid I should ever give you to a man you did not love. I promise you, my child, your wishes shall be respected." He was

no longer dreamy, but spoke with comforting determination.

Beryl kissed him silently. It seemed to her then as if she had never pitied him half enough before. He had been very weak in making his own second marriage. To-day's events gave her some knowledge of what this weakness had meant. With such an example before her, she was not likely to follow suit.

Her father returned the kiss. "You are a great comfort to me, Beryl, and very like *her*. There, go along; be a little girl again, and forget it all."

But he remembered his promise, and, almost for the first time since his marriage, spoke with such decision to Mrs. Millington that, though she vented her irritation in many petty ways, she never again alluded directly to Mr. Hertford's offer. She had been a trifle scared to discover that, for all his gentle apathy, her husband could be sternly firm when he considered it expedient.

The poor "White Knight" left for his lugubrious holiday next morning, much to Betty's satisfaction. She had no idea that his unlucky little love-story had been begun and ended; indeed, she soon forgot all about him in the excitement of a new interest.

There was a little copse, not far from the common where Kismet had been buried, which was one of her

favorite haunts. Rare flowers, ferns, butterflies, and moths were here to be discovered by those who knew where to look for them. In a sequestered nook on the outskirts there lurked in spring a few clumps of the quaint spotted fritillary that still nods in purple profusion over the Islip meadows, and has been so remorselessly rooted out of Middlesex.

Betty had seen the place noted in a natural history of the county as one of the habitats of the Purple Hairstreak butterfly. They had none in the collection, and she had often and often hunted the oak leaves to find the caterpillar, of which she occasionally thought she saw traces.

With what Betty considered to be her usual Sunday ill-fortune, she actually saw a number of the coveted insects flying high among the branches of a tall oak tree. The Sunday afternoon walk was always a hard trial to Betty, for it did seem as if the insects knew that they need fear no net, and therefore sunned themselves in unwonted profusion.

It had been hard to see the lovely, metallic purple wings glinting against the gold-green leaves. Betty had been a great climber in her youth, to the danger of herself and the detriment of her raiment, and, after an awful fall that had put out her collar-bone, had made a faithful promise to climb no more.

She did not think of breaking her word, but on

Monday induced the old gardener to lash two sticks together, so that, with a handle about six feet long, she could swing her net among the otherwise inaccessible branches, and prepare a delightful surprise for the boys in the shape of a complete series of Purple Hairstreaks. She had not been fortunate in her captures of late, and Bevan had insinuated, with shameless ingratitude, that "he didn't believe she was half so keen now that she thought she was growing up."

She did not confide her plan to any one. Her own holidays had begun, so that it would not be difficult to slip off unobserved. Betty loved even a small adventure, and always considered it well worth the scolding or punishment in which it was rather apt to result. Beryl would be certain to advise her to wait for the boys, and this was precisely what she did not want to do.

She went down the glebe meadow at about half-past ten on what she smilingly said to herself was a regular butterfly day. It was hot, but not sultry, and the sky was almost cloudless.

"If the aggravating things are not out now, they never will be again," she said to herself. But there they were by the time she reached the little copse, where the brambles were coming into pink bloom among the underwood. She found at once that her

long-handled net was very difficult to wield. The delicate purple insect flitted high above it, and after over an hour spent in fruitless endeavor, she sat down, hot and disappointed, to eat a three-cornered puff she had begged of the old cook. It was very good, but even new raspberry jam could not assuage her vexation.

Conscience, too, was troublesome, and was getting the worst of an internal argument. She had rashly promised never to climb again, but surely in a case of such extreme importance, she was fully justified in straining a point? Only Beryl was so fearfully particular.

She looked up above her, and beheld the Hairstreaks sailing about in all the consciousness of perfect security. Then she glanced at the tree. It was a particularly tempting one.

"Ah, well, I am not as good as Beryl; but it is so much easier for her, for she cares nothing for the collection."

Then she decided, and with easy agility began to climb. She found one delightful branch, from which she swung her legs to and fro in fearless confidence, quite hidden by thickly encompassing boughs.

"I wonder if Charles the Second was as comfortable at Boscobel. Certainly not as happy," she decided a moment later, when she easily captured one

of the Hairstreaks and put it into the killing bottle with the true collector's utter absence of pity. She caught a second soon afterward, but the rest were rather coy and difficult.

She was now, however, in high spirits, which were suddenly dampened by an apparition of Beryl, who had been sent out to take the twins for a walk, and had chosen the copse as the coolest place available for the purpose.

"Here come my Roundheads," soliloquized Betty, wondering whether her dangling feet and large, dusty shoes were visible from the ground.

Beryl was looking about for ferns, and certainly not troubling herself as to what might be above her.

"We want to sit down; we are tired," said Alice, who always spoke for herself and twin. "We want a story, Berry—not a stupid little boy and girl story, but one like Betty tells, with dragons and fairies."

They sat down a little way beyond the tree, and Betty could hear every syllable they said from her airy perch. She had, however, just caught her third Hairstreak, so was strengthened in her resolution to remain where she was until the series of six had been duly bottled.

Beryl could not invent, but she could remember. She always did what the children wished, as long as their demands were reasonable, so she threw herself

on the short, mossy turf and began obediently: "Once upon a time there was a fairy prince."

"Not a fairy prince, but a very commonplace young man," said a laughing voice, and there was Harold Buchanan, who had seen the little group cross the road into the copse, and had somehow discovered he had half an hour to spare. "But although it wasn't a fairy prince, he had some nice sweets in his pocket," he continued, smiling down at Beryl. "Come, Alice, which do you like best, sweets or stories?"

"Sweets." The twins spoke together and fervently. They agreed on most points, especially on this one.

He brought out a good-sized square box, and handed it over amid cries of delight.

"Now run away and play, for I want to talk to your sister."

Betty, from her perch, listened with guilty interest, touched with a babyish longing for one of those fat brown chocolates.

"All right, we'll have a shop," said Alice, and the two ran away, utterly forgetting their fairy prince.

Beryl had been quite silent. She sat still on a mossy old stump, and played with her ferns. She had taken off her hat, and the breeze just ruffled her

pretty hair. She was very happy, and made no troublesome inquiries as to the cause.

"I wanted to tell you a piece of good news," began Buchanan, leaning over her.

"Just as Cyril de Vere did with Etheldreda," parenthesized the unseen witness.

"When I was at college I was lucky enough to save a man's life when we were out bathing, or he thought I did. He is a doctor, and has made a big practice in Yorkshire, so large that he wants a partner. He has offered me the post for a price that is ridiculous. It is a good thing, and I think I shall accept it."

Beryl looked up at him timidly. All the gladness had gone out of her face in a moment. He was going away. That was really the only fact that she grasped. "I hope you will like it very much," she said sedately but not joyously.

He smiled again. That letter had made him rush to a decision that he was tired of living alone. He had not meant to tell her quite so soon, but perhaps he would never get a sweeter opportunity than here, under the green trees, well out of reach of Mrs. Millington.

Perhaps Harold Buchanan felt more assurance than does the ideal lover, but Beryl saw no shortcomings as he stood there in the flickering gold-green

lights and shadows. He was tall and strong, with thick brown hair, inclined to curl, and brown eyes that to-day wore a new expression.

Betty felt almost desperate. Supposing, only supposing, Doctor Buchanan cared for Beryl and was going to tell her so, and she obliged to be listening. It was too dreadful. She turned scarlet. If they only would look up and find her out. But there was no chance of that while Beryl sat there with her eyes on the ground, and the doctor looked so intently at her.

"But I do not want to leave Northbent without finding out something first."

He had lowered his voice, but Beryl sprang to her feet, for a well-known voice was calling her energetically. Two minutes more, and Betty, with a torn frock and dishevelled hair, dropped from a branch above them.

"Why, Betty, you don't mean to say you were climbing, after that accident last year and all your promises?" Beryl spoke more crossly than she had ever done in her life, but Betty felt almost too much ashamed to frame a defence for her conduct.

"I thought you never broke your word," said Buchanan, who was annoyed too, but could not help feeling pity for the girl's obvious wretchedness, and amusement at the absurdity of the situation.

"It's the first time," she said very truthfully and repentantly, and then she told the story of the Purple Hairstreaks.

Buchanan was an entomologist himself, and he sympathized; and the good Beryl brought out a pocket housewife and mended the frock.

"I *must* go now," said Buchanan with obvious unwillingness; "but I shall see you again soon."

Alas for Betty's visions and Beryl's shy hopes. On their return they were met by the news that Beryl was to go to Eastbourne for two or three weeks. An aunt had invited her to take little Barbara for sea air and change. They were to leave two days afterward, and not once did she catch sight of Harold Buchanan in the interval.

Betty was comforted by the rapture with which her five specimens were received.

Beryl innocently wondered why the loquacious Alice never alluded to that box of sweets or its donor. She did not know that Betty had threatened a permanent suspension of the thrilling history of "The Three Green Fairy Frogs" if the subject were ever mentioned, and now that all the chocolates were eaten Betty's stores assumed their wonted importance in the lives of the twins.

CHAPTER XIII.

IMPOTENCE.

NOT every one who has accomplished creative work knows of the joys of inspiration.

With some there is always more of pain than of pleasure in production. There is an insatiate desire to produce, to demonstrate to the world at large that it may be beneath an unattractive envelope there is yet a hidden power.

These artists know little of the ecstasy of sheer delight in the work itself. They do not sit smiling with fluent pens that flow naturally into tuneful lyrics or dainty idylls. If they be musicians, they are overmastered by the storm and stress of the wild ideas that are so hard to imprison in the cold black and white of the written score. As painters they fare worst of all. A haunting, miserable sense of the futility of their utmost effort seldom leaves them. They paint under protest, as it were. A spirit leads them, they scarcely know how, to embark upon a great picture, and then deserts them at the crucial moment.

Sometimes the birth-throes of their own agonizing moments of disillusionment give the world the strongest and in some sense the finest work. Carlyle, ill, unhappy, misunderstood, has yet left us a goodly heritage that shall endure like a strong rock when the facile claimants of the popularity of the hour are as forgotten as last year's leaves. Verily they have their reward, even when they drink their bitter cup to the lees.

To these, that gnawing sense of dissatisfaction is pathetically familiar, and, like all familiar evils, more bearable on that account. Weaker men, like Adrian Sarel, who are easily moved by the bright promptings of hope and ambition, who have a sort of perennial youthfulness of imagination that conjures up rosy clouds of airy, delightful day-dreams, these are even more sorely smitten when the inevitable time of discouragement draws nigh.

Only the artist knows the pang of sitting down with nerveless hands before the blank paper, the silent instrument, the empty canvas, powerless to do or to create. The thing itself is beyond expression hopeless and horrible, but it is worst and cruellest when Necessity, like a witch of evil omen, whispers, pointing to a wife or little children, "Whence shall ye have bread, that these may eat?"

Then, in his despair, the artist is false to the mis-

tress he has sworn to love and serve. His ideal averts her exquisite, fathomless eyes. He dares not wait humbly till once again she shall smile upon him with the old seduction. He must work to live, must prostitute his talent, even his genius, because time flows away so fast, because there is no leisure in this hard-pressed nineteenth century for the dreamer to lie propped on beds of lotos.

Let those who have leave to work at an art for other means than bread, humbly thank the almighty Giver of rich gifts. They are saved so much temptation, so much lonely suffering and sorrow.

When Sarel left Allaronde and reached his little, empty home, his only craving was for unbroken solitude. In the bare, newly whitewashed studio he set up his great easel. Summer seemed to have departed with strange suddenness, for a spell of gusty rain followed the long season of sunshine, and the north light streamed in very gray and very cold. He craved for isolation and silence, two things he had formerly regarded with a certain aversion.

The few precautions for disinfecting the rooms the children had occupied were quickly taken. Aline had accompanied her mistress to Eastbourne, and the other servant had been given a holiday. With many private fears for Adrian's comfort, Isabel had

installed a deaf but tolerably competent old woman from the village in her place.

She had been very much surprised to find how easily her husband had acquiesced in all these arrangements. She had no conception of the true state of his mind, the repugnance on his part for the old lines of life, the eager longing to be absolutely free to devote heart and soul and brush to a picture that should satisfy himself and make the world acknowledge it had misjudged him. He wanted fame, but, to do him justice, he chiefly longed to do something that should seem good in his own eyes.

He had been so full of his picture that even Philippa's confession had scarcely roused him from his waking dreams. Looking back upon the remembrance of her beauty and her tears, he was surprised they had not moved him more. He had done right to repulse her. He had been true to his wife, and certainly he did not love her. These were things profitable for reflection. But, on the other hand, he had ill requited Philippa, who had given him so much.

He sat idle before "Sister Helen," lost in unproductive meditation. Now that he was alone, absolutely uninterrupted, free to paint from dawn to dark, what was this that placed a sudden barrier between himself and the achievement that had looked so close at hand?

Hitherto he had always been able to work only too easily at the things that pleased him. Every moment he could snatch, and many moments that ought to have been otherwise employed, had been dedicated to "Medea"—an absolute failure, he was quite ready now to admit. But to have all the means, and, without warning, to feel paralyzed, was horrible.

Several days passed by with leaden slowness; every hour lengthened into a day, every day into a week. He painted feverishly, only to undo again and again the hopeless result. Still the same faultless ideal looking from the clouds, still the same lack of any inspiration to drag her from that airy coign of vantage and enshrine her in the picture. Gone was that delicious sense of nearing triumph that had embellished those last sunny days at Allaronde.

One afternoon the wind howled pitifully with an almost autumnal wailing, and the rain beat against the window pane, round which the fading roses hung heavy heads. Adrian was in a mood accordant with the wild, ungenial August that so belied the promise of June and July.

A letter from Isabel, full of pleasure in the warmth of her reception and of the happiness of the children, only added to his utter depression. Isabel had no power to put her love into words in a letter. There was no very cogent sign that he was missed or

wanted even by her who thought of him every moment.

"They make quite a daughter of me, and are devoted to the children. They say they would like us to live with them altogether; but as that cannot be, they want me to leave Fay behind for two or three months after our return. It is something to have such good friends, and I feel very rich in their possession," she wrote.

Adrian always depended greatly on surrounding circumstances. When the sun shone he was apt to be cheerful, but he had nothing of the merry heart that makes sunshine for itself. Just now he was sad and discouraged with a discouragement that almost merited the name of despair.

He had looked at "Sister Helen" so long that her charm was fast vanishing in his eyes. There was something, he reflected, labored, unreal, unsatisfying in the pose. Perhaps, after all, he had misconceived his subject. At any rate, he would make a fresh study, to see if the fault lay in the kneeling posture of the figure. Would it not be more dramatic to draw "Sister Helen" standing, pointing with one outstretched hand to the flames, with horror in her great gray eyes?

He had not got far with the painting of his original picture. He really was a draughtsman of rare

ability, but was always less happy with color. There was something very harsh in the flesh tints; nothing of the warm, creamy pallor of his model. No emotion would give Philippa that hardness, that rigidity of outline. His "Sister Helen" wore no latent suggestion of the passion that had held her in its chains, the tenderness now frozen into hatred. She was not woman enough. He would draw her again in quite another aspect, giving her a touch of fear for her own sinfulness, less of determination.

It was not till he stood before a blank canvas with the charcoal in his dexterous hand that an inexpressible wish for his model rushed over him. She would have looked perhaps more beautiful in this position than kneeling. Every line of the figure that was so Greek would have told forcibly, stretched to its full height. What had he been about to let her crouch before the fire? It was decidedly all a mistake. She had said that she loved him. If that were true, would she not come at a word, and, for his art's sake, might he not send that word?

He looked aimlessly out of the window that commanded the wet, solitary lane, with its high hedges swaying in the wind. Just at the moment when he most wanted her, he saw Philippa walking along alone, heedless of the weather, as if she had been drawn there by the strength of his desire. She wore

a long black cloak, but the air had brought no color to her cheeks. She was pale and looked worn.

As she passed she glanced at the window, and their eyes met. Adrian forgot his duty then. He had no love for her, but his heart ached with a smarting sense of failure. If she would sit again, it might be that his inspiration would return.

With this one thought he opened the house door and followed her bareheaded. She was walking very slowly, as if she had expected him to join her, and showed no surprise when he did so. He touched her hand with an eagerness she noticed joyfully, but of which he himself was scarcely conscious.

"It is bad weather for you to be out, surely. Will you come into the cottage and shelter from the rain?"

"Thank you; I will wait a few moments, if it will not interrupt your work, for you are busy, and have made great progress since I saw you last, no doubt."

She spoke in her most conventional manner, although she made no real effort to call pride to her rescue. Supposing she did go into the house, surely even the most censorious would admit that she had a perfect right to shelter from the storm.

Adrian led the way into the studio, painfully conscious of the forlorn aspect of the little, silent home.

"If I had had any idea of being so honored, I would have had a fire. As it is, it is not even laid,

and my one servant has gone to the village," he said with obvious restraint.

"I am not cold."

Philippa sat down in an arm-chair and threw back her cloak. She looked at the picture long and very critically. She was intensely disappointed. The painting was utterly wanting in breadth and richness. The draperies looked tawdry. Her disappointment showed itself so plainly in her face that Adrian knew his worst fears were justified, and it was a hard moment.

His loneliness found vent. "You see, it is a dead failure after all," he burst out passionately. "For the last week, every touch I have put to the thing has made it worse and worse. From the day I left Allaronde nothing has gone right. It is beyond my strength. I never ought to have undertaken it. All these days I have either sat idle before the easel or else painted so atrociously as to ruin the little I did last week. Now I am haunted by a new idea. I think my entire conception was wrong. I wasted so much of the beauty of the subject by that kneeling position. When I saw you I was trying to sketch "Sister Helen" standing erect, merely pointing to the melting figure. There will be the dignity of the full-length, and a beauty in the bare arm outstretched, with the heavy draperies falling back. And she

must wear crimson robes that will reflect and hold all the glory of the flames."

He brightened as he spoke. The old enthusiasm sparkled momentarily in his eyes, the tendency Philippa had so speedily learnt to recognize, to fancy the work actually done as nothing beside the new idea that should surpass it. He was very much changed in appearance, thinner, older-looking, and she saw gray threads in his thick hair she had never noticed before.

What a long time that wet week had been! What dismal hours she had spent with her books or with Arthur. And all the time Adrian had tried in vain to paint without his model, nay, his inspirer. When would he learn he could not do without her? When would he be ready to break the chains of circumstance, and to live for art and for her. Oh, she would be a handmaid to his true sovereign! His work would be as dear, as sacred, to her as to him. Had she lost all her magic? Did he scorn her, or was he only indifferent, absorbed?

"You cannot paint here, without a model," she began, with conviction in her voice. "Try again to re-paint the head in the first picture. It is a splendid conception. You cannot improve it."

She did what she had never done before. She flung herself upon her knees in the exact pose of the

picture; she assumed that awful, anguished look of despair. It had ceased raining, and a pale, watery gleam of sunlight brightened the dull room and showed its poverty and its neglect pitifully, while it lit her figure with a strange luridness. Philippa, in that strained, unnatural position, was keenly alive to every trifle.

Adrian saw nothing, heard nothing, thought of nothing, but that his power had returned. Without a word he took his brushes and palette, and rapidly, skilfully retouched the deep eyes, the pale cheeks, the firm chin. Gone was all fear of failure, gone even any remembrance of the woman kneeling beside him. Sister Helen, with her dishonored beauty, her vengeance, was before him. Again he could create. The strange difference a few fortunate touches make in a picture was amply manifest.

For half an hour she kept her trying pose, almost as motionless as if she had been a statue. The clouds parted, and a crimson sunset lit her face with a sullen splendor. She was scarcely conscious of the time that passed. In a few moments her limbs ached with the unaccustomed strain, but she did not stir.

She longed for Adrian to break the silence that became almost terrible. How different he looked now. There was triumph in the eyes that every

moment sought her own, and yet not hers. He saw only Sister Helen; Philippa Farrant, she thought bitterly, might die when his picture was finished, and he would not greatly care.

At last she could bear it no longer. The tension was too great. A sudden unconsciousness swept over her, and with a little, startled cry she fell back fainting.

Adrian turned round sharply, annoyed at the interruption. He was strangely, unreasonably vexed. He had no pity for her weakness. A kind of selfish absorption made him indifferent to all but his own work.

He threw down his brushes with visible annoyance, and glanced at the prostrate figure without much compassion. He was surprised at his own callousness, and at last roused himself to sprinkle some water upon her face.

She revived with a long sigh, wounded, as she battled back to consciousness, to see the coldness with which he watched her.

"I am so sorry," she said freely, as she leant back in the arm-chair. "I do not often faint, but the pose was trying. I shall be myself again in a moment."

"Forgive me. I was a brute to let you kneel like that." Adrian spoke as if in a dream, and as he stretched out his hand to touch the beloved picture,

she noticed for the first time the scar on the right wrist, and vaguely wondered what had caused it.

Presently she was able to stand up, and could look at "Sister Helen" for herself.

"It is magic," she said joyfully, "magic. In this short time you have put something into that face that was never there before. The eyes speak now. You have painted a living woman."

Her glad assurance was too genuine to be assumed, he saw.

"Do not think of altering one line. It would be madness. It is so great as it is."

"I shall owe it all to you if it succeeds. Why do you heap such obligations on one who has done nothing, can do nothing, for you?" Adrian spoke almost sullenly.

Philippa smiled and sighed. "I am still your friend, at least. I am very proud of your friendship, and any service I can do is sweet to me."

"You saved my child's life; you will save my name from being quite forgotten. What can I do or say to show my gratitude?"

"You can come back to Allaronde," she whispered.

"Not that. It is impossible." The thought of Arthur's simple faith and sincerity made his resolution hold.

"But you cannot paint 'Sister Helen' altogether without me. See how you tried."

"And how I failed. Yes, I know."

"I will do something more," she said slowly. "I will come here now and then. I will make it possible. I can fix no times, but you will surely see me. It is late now. I must get home. I am quite well again. Go on painting whilst the light lasts."

Her heart beat so fast, her mind was so busy, as she went down the road, that she did not notice she was watched. Mrs. Millington was returning from a long round of parish visits, and knew that there was no mistaking any other woman for Mrs. Farrant.

Adrian painted until the last rays of light had vanished. Later, as he sat smoking and dreaming, he fancied he saw the prostrate figure lying before him, and the fancy had a strange reality.

Next morning he perceived that the work he had done after her departure was not excellent. "Evidently I can do nothing without her." This was his conclusion.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFIDENCES.

BETTY and the boys in holiday spirits without Beryl to keep any kind of order had almost made Mrs. Millington realize that her step-daughter's marriage might not be such an unmixed blessing, after all.

In the absence of her docile proxy for unpleasant duties, she had been obliged to walk a mile in the rain to see an old woman who had announced herself dying. But she had felt all the truth of the aphorism that virtue is its own reward when she had seen Philippa Farrant coming out of Lettice Close cloaked and veiled.

Any mystery to which she had a clue rejoiced her. From the first she had disliked Adrian Sarel, and since her encounter with his wife that dislike had become very definite. She was so triumphant in the assurance she had been right and that silly, headstrong girl in the wrong, that she forgot she ought to simulate some decorous horror at such a possible scandal in their midst. It might be, perhaps, too

much to say that she liked her neighbors to be faulty ; but without their weaknesses to discuss, life would have been robbed of its chief savor.

It is needless to add that she put the worst possible construction upon Mrs. Farrant's conduct. Philippa was too cold and haughty, too impatient of inferiority and ignorance, to be a favorite with any common-minded person. Mrs. Millington longed to pour the whole story into the sympathetic ear of one of those delightful listeners who could be relied upon to agree with her in all points, and to enlarge with righteous indignation upon her suggestions. Destitute as she was of tact, she had known experiences that decided her not to take her husband into her confidence.

The more she thought over the matter, the more she perceived it to be her bounden duty to write and warn Isabel that her husband was being led astray. She had certainly behaved with shameless rudeness and ingratitude on that prior occasion she never particularly cared to dwell upon. All the more reason to show a Christian spirit, and—to let her know the worst.

It would have been hard to convince Mrs. Millington that she was actuated by any motive save one of sincere charity, for no amount of skilled argument could have induced her to see herself in any light but that of a model vicar's wife and ideal stepmother.

The anonymous letter is the pet weapon of the coward. She felt quite virtuous when, in a feigned handwriting, she had indited and posted what she considered a very temperate version of a very terrible affair, coming in at tea-time in so unwontedly amiable a mood that Betty wondered greatly. Betty's allies, the boys, had gone to London, but as it had ceased raining, she asked if she could go for a walk.

"Make yourself tidy and brush your hair, for your father wants you to take a note up to Allaronde. Mr. Farrant has sent five pounds for the school treat," said Mrs. Millington.

Betty acceded joyfully. Allaronde was a sort of fairyland to her. She had been through the gardens from time to time on similar errands, and had seen tantalizing visions of the beauty of the hall. She would have liked to explore the house quite by herself, especially as Etheldreda and Cyril de Vere had lived there after their marriage.

But it was not of that famous hero and heroine that she thought as, clad in a particularly ugly waterproof, she splashed briskly through the puddles. She loved her eldest sister better than any one else in the world, and she had a certain fear lest she might all unwittingly have interfered in a very important crisis of Beryl's life on that well-remembered day

when she had climbed the copse oak for the Purple Hairstreaks.

Clumsy Betty, with her large, shabbily booted feet, her plain face and straight hair, was standing on the threshold of womanhood, all unconscious that she could never be a child again after understanding the meaning of Harold Buchanan's few words and those more eloquent looks Beryl herself had not seen.

To her, love was a wonderful thing, a miracle that befell Juliet and Portia and her own valiant favorites, Rebecca and Diana Vernon. She scarcely allowed herself to recall that little scene under the flickering green leaves. It somehow seemed almost profane. The wild, daring Betty was shy and careful of this lovely little romance she hardly dared to look back at.

The thoughts of a quite simple young girl about love are curiously exquisite, unless pronounced beauty makes her precocious and rubs away all the delicate glamour. The coming years might hold never a lover for this honest, high-souled maiden, who was too busy with dreams to trouble much as to dull realities.

Yet she felt quite guilty and hot when a cheerful "Where are you off to, Miss Betty?" made her look round, to be greeted by Harold Buchanan.

"I am going to dine at Allaronde, to play piquet with Mr. Farrant, so we can walk there together," was his remark when she had told her errand.

He liked Betty immensely, and she was Beryl's sister. The interruption to his sunny little summer idyll had given it poignancy. He had not known how he should miss the bright face that wore a new expression when he looked at it. Beryl absent took a touch of the ideal. He would woo more earnestly, perhaps less confidently, when she returned,

Meanwhile, although he did not know it, he was desperately in need of a confidante. Men make fun of women for liking to pour their love sorrows or joys into an attentive ear. They are just as bad themselves, and make the best-natured of their friends martyrs to the "inexpressive she." If they are susceptible and have several, they become bores.

Buchanan was only Scotch by extraction, so he did not beat about the bush very long. "I hope your sister is enjoying herself," he began untruthfully. Naturally, he would have liked an impossible assurance that Beryl was miserable because she was away from him.

Betty could not have been quite so devoid of tact as was supposed. There was diplomacy in her reply. "I don't think Berry much wanted to go. Aunt Coventry is deaf; she is a widow, and very Low

Church. She doesn't know any young people. Then, Eastbourne is so fashionable."

"And Miss Beryl does not like that? I thought all girls did."

"Berry is not a bit like other girls. She is worth a thousand of them. We miss her fearfully at home. Till she went, no one had any idea how much she did. Why, even father found out his books were never dusted, and missed the little vase of flowers on the writing-table, and you know what father is; everybody does."

Betty spoke warmly, but her voice softened as she added, with a little look at the cloudy sky that touched her listener involuntarily, "We think Beryl must be very like our own mother. On the night of the ball she looked the image of the picture in the hall, in her white dress, with the roses—and the shoes," she concluded, with a laugh at her own daring.

Buchanan was not displeased. "You spoke the truth when you said you could keep a secret, Betty. You have kept two of mine. I want you to do something more. Give me your sister's address, and don't tell any one I asked for it."

"Five, Compton Terrace." Betty's heart thumped with excitement, but she was far too impressed with the dignity of her position to let anything so vulgar

as curiosity creep into her answer. She got her reward.

They had turned up a side path in the Allaronde woods that were dim and shadowy in the dusk.

"Perhaps you can guess that I want to be your brother some day. Would you be as good a sister to me as you are to her?" Buchanan spoke impulsively.

Betty held out both her bare, brown hands. "I should be so, so glad; but, oh, if we miss her for such a little while, what should we all do?" She spoke conditionally too. If she knew what Beryl's answer would be, she was too modest and too proud to hint at it.

They went on in silence, both busy with their own thronging thoughts. "Shall I write? Shall I wait?" alternated Buchanan. "How happy she will be when she knows," thought Betty, her quick imagination allowing her a thrilling foretaste of first love, though he did not give it any kind of personal application.

"Good-night," she said, after she had delivered her note, and they clasped hands warmly.

When the door had shut, the girl sighed as she turned away. The second great change had come into her young life, and she felt overwhelmed by a curious sense of responsibility.

"When Beryl is married, I shall be the eldest

daughter." It was a dreadful thought to harum-scarum Betty, and seemed to bring her dismally nearer to the detested period when she should be grown up. She remembered how many were Beryl's duties, how carefully fulfilled.

"I shall hate it all," she decided, winking away a rebellious tear that would force its way out. "Doing the church vases, paying calls with mamma, arranging the flowers, and seeing to all father's fads. I love father, and I do wish he would teach me Greek, but I don't think he loves me as much as Beryl. Who could? I shall have to try to take her place, and, oh, I shall make such a muddle of it! But no one shall ever know I'm not the gladdest of them all. For I am glad really. I like Doctor Buchanan; I always did. He will be a nice brother, and he knows something about insects. Very different from 'the White Knight.' I wonder how he will feel when he hears. Mamma will say she saw it all from the first. She always does when anything happens that is a surprise."

Betty said her morning and evening prayers sometimes very perfunctorily. But as she stood still a minute under the dripping trees, the most genuine petition she had ever formulated rose to her lips: "Make her happy and make me better." After that she hurried home with a comforting sense of peace.

It would come to all of us if we could pray half as unselfishly.

There were the makings of a noble woman in Betty, was Buchanan's decision when they parted.

He had come early, and found Arthur Farrant lying upon his couch, as usual, in his own pleasant sitting-room, hung round with the fishing-rods and racquets and riding-whips he would never use again. He was playing listlessly with his favorite terrier, but he looked worn and tired.

"I am afraid you are not feeling quite as bright as usual to-night," said the young doctor kindly.

"Much the same, thank you; but I am worried about my wife. She does not look herself. She says she is well, but for the last few days she has been different. Be a good fellow, and watch her, and tell me honestly if you think anything is amiss. I can trust you, and I am so helpless. But before I begin on my own affairs, I ought to congratulate you on the news I have heard. It will rob me of a friend here; still, I cannot but be glad of your luck. For you are lucky, Buchanan, and you deserve to be. You have given this poor, helpless dog many good times. You must promise me to come here when you want a holiday, and when you marry you must bring her for me to see."

Buchanan was touched. The little jest was, he

hoped, so near a happy earnest. "Thank you," was all he put into words, but his voice was expressive, and Arthur was content.

Philippa swept into the room as he spoke, with a frou-frou of heavy, dark silks, and a faint, delicate perfume. She was looking her best, with a restless sparkle in her deep eyes and a rose flush on her cheeks. Both men were struck afresh by the power of her beauty, and as they dined Buchanan looked in vain for any sign of ill-health.

That she was changed after some fashion there was no doubt. He could see what her husband saw, and something more. A vague suspicion that it was some new feeling that lit her eyes with a magic his own quiet love made impotent to him struck him uneasily more than once. Supposing, after all, that she and Adrian Sarel——

But no! perish the thought! She was his friend's wife; he would not wrong her. Women had become suddenly sacred since he was on his way to find all the heaven of heavens in one gentle face.

Philippa played the piano, as usual, while they sat over their cards. He was not musical enough to know what it was, but the dreamy passion of it, albeit so alien to his own steadfast heart, was not quite without an influence.

Arthur was a brilliant card player, and in his one

possible excitement he forgot his anxiety for a time in the interest of the game. His pleasure in trifles literally kept him alive, and he was pathetically grateful to any one who would indulge it.

Presently Philippa stopped abruptly, more as if she were tired of the piano than because of any legitimate conclusion in the music. They were in the north drawing-room, and the chilly night excused a cheery wood fire. The two men, absorbed in their game, had the couch and the little card-table that was screwed to its side just where the easel had stood.

By the window where she now looked out into the darkness she had faltered that mad confession. She remembered every word she had spoken. She would not recall one of them if she could, for to-day Adrian had surely begun to learn that he could not do without her.

She felt very tired with the strain and excitement of the afternoon, and a sudden sense of oppression swept over her. She wanted to feel the cool air upon her, to indulge in one of those dreams that were hardly possible in this close atmosphere, with the monotonous interruptions of the players.

"I am going out for a few minutes, Arthur," she said as she left the room.

"A little too damp, isn't it?" suggested Buchanan as the door shut.

"Nothing ever seems to hurt her in the way of weather," replied her husband. "She was out walking in all that storm this afternoon. She says she cannot live without exercise. I thought so too once, yet here I am."

"And here we all hope you may be for years yet, for the sake of all your friends. Your life is too useful."

Buchanan spoke with sincerity. He saw qualities in Arthur Farrant that few were able to perceive, and had learnt more than one wholesome lesson beside that chair. He had been inclined to be somewhat cynical when he had found that, without capital, his "M.D. of Edinburgh" could not secure him anything better than Northbent and drudgery. He had had his ambitions and his successes, and nothing had come of either.

Arthur's patience had made him realize how much life held for a man who had youth and strength. He had despised Northbent as an embodiment of suburban gentility, lacking all the broader intellectual friction of London and the freedom of the country. In a more philosophical mood he might have found something of the good qualities of both in the little place. Now it would always be dear to him, for it had brought him Beryl.

"I'm getting as sentimental as an undergraduate,"

he decided mentally. But he did not object to it. Love had a freshness to him it very seldom possesses for a man of his age. He had never sown his wild oats after the fashion that produces the most abundant harvest of remorse and shame.

Philippa did not return, and after the game was ended Arthur asked his friend to take her a cloak or shawl if, as usual, she had gone out without any wrap.

He took up the first thing he could find, and opened the door. Philippa was close at hand. She heard the sound, and came toward him with a smile.

"The air is delicious, but Arthur evidently thinks I want muffling up. Well, I must obey him, and you, I suppose."

She did not notice that it was the cloak she had worn in the afternoon till she felt its damp, heavy folds. She was standing on the threshold, and the cold electric light of the hall was full upon her. She threw it back as it touched her bare neck.

"Get me something else, please. This is quite wet. I wore it to-day in the rain."

Buchanan took it obediently, but he started as he hung it in its place. His hand was crimson, as if with blood, and he saw a great, fresh scarlet stain upon the blackness. He guessed in an instant what it was.

"I must ask you to let me wash my hands before

I touch anything else. There was paint upon that cloak, and they are covered with it."

He saw her shiver slightly and turn pale. Then he was sure there was some cause for the suspicion that had haunted him. Before he went back to Arthur he had decided on his course of action. That he might be wrong he hoped fervently, that this supreme buffeting of fate might be spared the patient invalid whose handsome face was so kindly as he caressed the two terriers whining for notice.

"I think you are right about Mrs. Farrant," he began guardedly. "She is a trifle out of sorts, but in my opinion she merely wants a very simple remedy. This air is rather relaxing. I should get her to go away for a week or two. A little sea or mountain is the best of tonics."

When he had gone, Arthur repeated this advice to his wife. "You are too good to me," he said, "and you must be fearfully tired of Allaronde. Promise me to take a holiday."

But she would give no promise. "I would rather be at home than anywhere else in the world." There was an unwonted earnestness in her words.

"So she may be learning to love me a little even now," thought Arthur. He clung so to the hope that never quite deserted him, and sank peacefully to sleep with a smile upon his face.

But Philippa could not sleep for hours. When she had locked her door, she sat down to review her position. Could Harold Buchanan by any possibility have guessed her secret? Surely not; or, if he had, what use could he make of his knowledge? That he would never tell her husband she was certain.

It had been a long day. It had begun and ended badly. But it had held golden hours. If she had been so happy merely as Adrian's humble model, what should she be when he acknowledged all his debt to her, all her inspiration she had brought him? A model, even the imagination that had almost her own portrait in "Medea," might give the beauty. She alone could magnetize him to genius.

She loosened her heavy hair, and looked into a silver hand-mirror. She rejoiced, not that she was so beautiful, but that she had a heart to love, a brain to think.

"When our picture is painted, he must understand, he must know all."

Her eyes fell upon a water-color sketch on the wall, a masterpiece of delicate coloring and poetry—Sorrento, set like a jewel on the edge of the blue sea. When at last she lost consciousness, she had dreams of the bounteous Italian autumn, of its rosy oleanders and odorous daturas.

CHAPTER XV.

“THE INTERREGNUM.”

 ASTBOURNE, in the very height of a full season, is a cheerful place, with its blue bright sea and its background of breezy downs. Isabel, temporarily free from those grinding money anxieties, and watching Randie's rosy cheeks and Fay's radiant delight in the treasures of the beach, was looking younger and happier than she had done for years past.

Before a fortnight had slipped away, her eyes were bright, and, with a few rebellious curls escaping the bondage of the ugly hat, she looked and felt strangely like the Isabel Dale of old times. She used to go out on the shore for long, delightful mornings, taking lunch with her, and stitching industriously while the children played tirelessly. It is easy enough to leave fashion behind. Smart people cling together as if they fear their own impotence unless they are united.

Quite a little way from the big pier, with the vulgarity piers always engender, on the Pevensey side,

the beach is given up to a babies' carnival. There the old saying, "Not Angles, but angels," has a fresh meaning.

Fay and Randie had plenty of playfellows. The haughtiest of nurses looked kindly on the little cripple as he limped after the merry bands of paddlers, while Fay was the capricious queen of any number of small boy-lovers. Bab Millington had made them her especial charges from their first meeting, and so it happened naturally enough that Beryl and Isabel were constantly thrown together.

Isabel was glad not to be left too much to solitary reflection. Deep in her heart lay misgivings she tried to banish. The kind old people she was with helped her more than they knew. To them she was but a child herself, and they petted and made much of her, lavishing toys on Fay and Randie, who soon learned to love them. Adrian wrote but seldom, but gave a satisfactory report of himself, so she gratefully rested after her long days and nights of nursing.

In spite of her stepmother's angry disapproval of Mrs. Sarel, Beryl decided, with unwonted independence, that she liked her very much, and was only too pleased to sit sewing and talking beside her. She was so homesick that to see a Northbent face was a delight, and there was always the chance that Isabel might mention Harold Buchanan. If ever she did,

it was with expressions of the sincerest gratitude for all his goodness during the time of the fever.

It did not occur to Beryl to make confidences after the usual girlish fashion. She had a delicate reticence that is one of the rare and lovely qualities modern women are losing. That day in the copse she had felt so happy and so confident. Now she wondered she could have let such presumptuous hopes steal into her heart. But Isabel guessed her secret with a woman's unfailing instinct, and loved Beryl all the more for the silence she herself would have kept.

One day she surprised her with tears in her eyes, sitting alone, hidden behind an old breakwater. She had a novel in her hands, and started when she saw who was coming. It was a cloudless afternoon, and the tide was flowing out, leaving a wet fringe of olive-brown seaweed on the shore and a touch of salt in the fresh air. The sea was almost white in the flashing sunlight, and the children's laughter rang out sweetly as they ran about on their little, noiseless bare feet.

"Oh, it is you, Mrs. Sarel. Do sit down. It is so pleasant here," Beryl exclaimed.

"I thought for a moment you did not want me," Isabel said with the shyness that sometimes made her awkward.

"Because I have been silly and cried over a book. At home I scarcely ever read a novel. There is so much mending and parish work to be done. Betty devours everything. She is very clever, and not a bit like me. Still, I very seldom cry over anything but real troubles. Have you read 'The Interregnum?' It is about the saddest thing that can happen. The girl loves some one, and he does not care for her, *never* cares for her."

"The saddest thing that can happen! How young she is, and how little she knows," thought Adrian's wife and Randie's mother.

"I wonder if men in real life are much like novel heroes," continued Beryl, looking wistfully over the golden water. "This Julian Ferris made the heroine his friend, and then by-and-by he left her and almost forgot her. He just used her as one would a toy, till he found something that pleased him better. Read it—just this one chapter that has almost frightened me—and I will go and pin up Bab's frock. She will get soaked if she goes into the water so far."

Isabel was not very fond of reading, and she had no sort of knowledge of novels of the new school. She obediently took the book and began the chapter, out of curiosity to read Beryl's feelings between the lines. It shocked and pained her somewhat.

"THE INTERREGNUM."

"Julian Ferris had been married nearly two years, but his conscience still troubled him about the other girl. He had married rather beneath his intellectual level, and was already finding marriage, if not a failure, at any rate different from the ideal vision his very brief moment of passion had held out to him as likely to be realized if he took the all-important step.

"Yet he had not, as the phrase goes, behaved badly to the other girl, who was so different from the woman he had made his wife. No word of love had ever passed between them. They had not met so often that rumor hurried them into a decision as to the precise nature of their intercourse by coupling their names. It was quite impossible for Ferris to describe the significance of the link that connected them. Grace Merrick had learnt with bitter suffering that it was her own unrequited love.

"Her secret was too well guarded to be even surmised by Ferris. Honest men are invariably blind in such cases. Ferris was a good fellow, something too much absorbed in his own at that time not very prosperous fortunes, but better, on the whole, than the generality of clever men. He had met Grace Merrick at a time when his reserve was inclined to

thaw. Her immediate tacit comprehension of some of his troubles, her friendly comradeship of ideas and ideals, insured her a quick entrance into the circle of intimates his critical nature made very narrow.

"Grace was a novelist of some ability, but no genius. As long as she kept her books well within her own horizon they were pleasant enough to read. When she wandered afield she was far less successful. Ferris did not admire the novels as much as he liked the writer. He was not at all a woman's man, and he thought the books feminine to weakness in parts, though he conceded a certain cultured nicety of phrase and delicacy of perception of the subtler shades of character.

"Outsiders had no conception of an intimacy she knew with aching certainty could never ripen into love. She was quite conscious that she merely filled the interregnum before some sudden passion should flash into his heart and exclude all minor interests. But her professional ability to analyze the situation competently did not make it any easier to endure.

"Circumstance suddenly separated them decisively and permanently. Grace took up her broken life and tried to piece the edges together. She had schooled herself to be brave and reasonable, reminded herself that she gave all to receive nothing. She would have died rather than admit that Julian Ferris

was in any way to blame. Yet he himself had moments of compunction. He felt he had made use of her, and then thrust her aside when the void in his life was filled.

"It was only after marriage had taught him, as he thought, to understand women, instead of, as a wiser man would have comprehended, to know a very little of one of them. Then it crossed his mind to wonder whether he had made a friend to fill a few solitary hours, and left a lonely spirit to struggle with a definite loss.

"He imagined there was no possible answer to the doubts that haunted him with increasing frequency when his allusions wore thin, until one day he took up a magazine in order to find something that might take him out of a not very contented self.

"Then the veil was roughly rent. He was not consistent, for, while admitting that he owed Grace Merrick some reparation, he yet resented her taking it in the one way that was possible.

"Grace had gone through a trying period before she had flung her pent-up grief into the anonymous story that stung Ferris with a self-reproach he hated when certain signs assured him it was hers. She was a proud woman, and a self-contained. She could not have shaped her experiences into a novel with a glorified portrait of herself as the heroine. That is

often done, and sometimes successfully, but not by Grace Merricks. Her suffering was all the keener that it had no glamour of romance about it, no bitter-sweet remembrance of broken vows or stolen kisses.

"It was not her own pain that had prompted this terse and matter-of-fact tale, told as she had never told the others that were mere children of her imagination. When she heard that Julian Ferris was married, her first emotion was a singular one. The news was brought her on a summer night, when all the earth was an Eden of silver-green moonlight.

"After the first stunned wonder that this thing did not alter everything as it altered her own existence, she was filled with very passionate pity for the women who were suffering as she was. Perhaps even more intensely, for she had had the preparation of many quiet hours of prospective renunciation, and until her hope lay dead before her, she had never admitted it existed.

"She had passed through those first hard wakings to the thought that the coming years must for her be barren of life's fairest flowers. She bore without rebellion the crushing knowledge that, for the sake of those about her, she dared claim no leisure to be sorrowful, that henceforth she must toil along the straight road of clearly defined duty with only the possible solace of making it less toilsome for others.

"It was a development of this thought that prompted her to write as she did; an idea that grew to a conviction that if she frankly and unreservedly bared her own heart's weakness, she might keep others from falling into a similar abyss.

"She had tried to take the man's point of view, had entered into the need of friendship and companionship closer and more instinct with fine tact than a fellow-man can offer, that is experienced by those who do not waste their emotions on flirtations. She had insisted on the fact that this friendship is quite alien to love, and certain so to remain. She did not censure men for enjoying such sympathy as they can command without further thought. She merely warned the women who are used as friends to beware how they accept the position.

"There was a restrained pathos about the story, an obvious effort to express in phrase of absolute clearness and simplicity those complex experiences and feelings that are so difficult to clothe in exact words.'

"It was a hard moment for Julian Ferris. He now felt for the first time that Grace had been the prelude to a more exciting episode. She had taught him not a little about her own sex, so that when he had wooed his wife he had done so with advantages, and now she had exacted payment for her services.

Could she have loved him? Were the tranquil-seeming eyes that so rarely met his own on fire with a love that was in vain?

"She had passed out of his life utterly. There was the present, with its daily routine, to be faced. There was the absorbing interest of his profession. There were compensations enough for the lost friendship.

"But his self-respect was wounded. A momentary idea of writing to Grace he dismissed contemptuously. What could he ask? What could he say? He stood looking thoughtfully at the fire. He felt as if he had been through the valley of humiliation. He sent up an urgent petition that Grace Merrick might never cross his path. - The prayer has been answered. His punishment had been sufficient."

Beryl came back, and watched Isabel curiously until she had put down the book.

"What do you think of it?" she asked after a pause.

"I think Ferris must have been a poor creature enough." Isabel spoke decisively. "Still, I couldn't like a woman who wrote in that way."

"Then you fancy such things do not happen often? I should die if it happened to me."

Isabel put her arms round her and kissed her, as if she had been a loving elder sister. "My dear, I am

sure that a very great happiness is waiting for you in the future."

Beryl returned the kiss warmly, and was comforted, though they said nothing more just then.

Isabel was right, but the future was a joyous present. There was a letter in Beryl's room when she went to it that evening. It was not very long, but when she had read it she flung herself upon her knees before the open window and looked up to the star-strewn darkness.

"Mother, darling mother, can you look down and see your happy Beryl?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.



HE news of Beryl's engagement touched very keenly the two women who felt that for them life had no more illusions. Isabel was glad that it should be. She was always glad of any tangible sign that there were true and beautiful things in life. Her interest in the two young lovers took her back to the sunny meadows round Lucerne where she had walked with Adrian. He had loved her then. She too had been in the Paradise that so swiftly changed Beryl from a child into a woman.

It is very seldom that a girl marries her first love. Isabel had done so, and it was characteristic that she should find pleasure in drawing a parallel between herself and Beryl. She drew no parallels between Adrian and Harold Buchanan. She put her husband on a pedestal too far above the world for this.

But she was happier for their happiness. It is only the very best of us who can rejoice with those that do rejoice. It is so much easier to sorrow with the sad than to sit in the shadow without envying

those in the glad sunshine. Isabel could do both with the same serene spirit, and until Beryl's return, with its shy delight of meeting and its trying cross-questionings from Mrs. Millington, she made a very sympathetic confidante.

It had not been easy for her to keep her former aspect of perfect contentment. Mrs. Millington's letter fell like a thunderbolt from the blue. She guessed whose hand had written it, and even found a forlorn comfort in remembering how boldly she had denied the first allegations brought against her husband.

The paper itself she burnt, with earnest prayers that she might still believe in Adrian's faith. "Let me not even wrong him in my thoughts," she implored pitifully, and from her heart arose the familiar words we cannot improve upon, "Lead him not into temptation."

She could seek no sympathy, ask no human comfort, no reassurance against the doubts and fears that mustered thickly round her. Only when Randie's evening prayer was said, she felt as if the child's innocent intercession was a talisman of safety for the absent father. She shared the tender belief with many another mother that there was a special power in those simple invocations. The golden-headed children are so much fresher from heaven that they

may well know best how to make themselves understood there, where there is neither speech nor language.

To Philippa, the restless, unquiet slave of a passion against which she had never even for a moment struggled, the sight of the shy, conscious Beryl brought a dull stab of pain. In that new world she would fain enter, there could be no place for these simple idyls.

Just a little while, and honest men and women might have no more part or lot with her. The dull, humdrum people she had despised, could she then care for their opinion? She hated the knowledge that even yet she could smart at the idea that she would be scorned. What? Could the chance meeting with this utterly commonplace pair waken such sensations? Love and art, art and love, for ever. That was to be her creed. Could she not freely do sacrifice for them?

She might wince at her own weakness, but it was there, just as it had been on that far-away day when she had received the news of her fortune and saved the life of Fay Sarel. To that episode, in all her conversations with Adrian, she had never alluded. She had feared Fay as the most dangerous rival, and had secretly rejoiced to find that of late her father never spoke of her.

She had kept to her refusal to leave home, and as Buchanan had been to Eastbourne for a few days, she had no difficulty in fulfilling her promise to Adrian. The weather had been broken, and Arthur unable to take his drives regularly. Everything had been in her favor.

The picture progressed, but scarcely as rapidly as she had expected. Each time she stole down to Lettice Close she had fresh proof that without her he could do nothing. The little work he accomplished in the intervals between her visits was strangely erratic and poor in character.

Once she was startled to find a great serpent lying coiled with a painful realism in the foreground of the picture.

"It haunted me until I got up and painted it there," Adrian said sombrely.

"You are not well. You are working too hard and thinking too much, or you would not have such fearful ideas."

Philippa was posing as patiently as ever, with her hair all in confusion.

"This life is killing me," he said quite suddenly, flinging down his palette and brushes. "I am changed. I cannot sleep, or, if I sleep, my dreams are worse than waking. I can never cease thinking of Sister Helen, and the words of the poem ring in

my ears like a death-knell. I shall never succeed. I am no genius, only a disappointed painter unworthy of his art, as I have always said."

He had spoken in this wild way more than once, but this time Philippa could resist no longer. "I believe in you. I know you better than you know yourself. See, I, who was so proud, can kneel here gladly as your model. If I left you——"

"If you left me I should cut the picture to pieces as I did 'Medea.' I cannot touch it except to ruin it unless you are beside me."

There was no faintest touch of tenderness in his despairing tones, yet Philippa, woman-like, merely drank in the words that were so precious. She put her white hand on his arm, and looked up pleadingly in his face. "Let us go away to Italy and forget all the sad past. We are miserable. You are depriving the world of a great artist by wasting your time here."

For days past Adrian's brain had been strangely clouded. The night he had said good-by to Allaronde, white thoughts of his wife and little children had come into his heart like guardian angels. There was no one to recall Isabel's name and sacred rights now. He was altogether reckless. The past was dead, the present dark with failure and baffled ambition. He could never go back to the old life, with

its small, tiresome restrictions, its poverty and its struggle. She was right. If she were with him, the old power, nay, a new spirit, would be his.

She was very beautiful as she knelt there pleading, but it was not her beauty that forced his answer, spoken almost fiercely; rather the ache of his own weary dissatisfaction. "I will come. We will be together always."

"Can it be possible you have learnt at last to love me, Adrian?"

The soft words, breathed in such an ecstasy, sounded vague and far away, echoes of a past with which he had now no part or lot. No saving memory of the blue lake at Lucerne and the blue eyes, like forget-me-nots, that had looked shyly into his own, blessed him at this supreme moment.

He looked down at Philippa, and there was a fire in his glance that she mistook for dawning passion. "I cannot live without you. Call it what name you like, enchantress."

"I must go now," whispered Philippa after a few moments, "but I will make arrangements. It must be very soon. We will go to Naples and finish 'Sister Helen.'"

"Your wishes are my laws." The words, but not the tone, had eagerness in them; but she was amply contented.

"We can go on Monday. There is no train to-morrow. It must be late or else it may be difficult. If you could come to Allaronde at twelve that night, I would be ready."

"At twelve on Monday I will be there," he repeated mechanically.

Her victory had been won, and as she went home swiftly in the dusk she magnified Adrian into a hero and his few words into magic. "When women love they are all alike," Adrian had said so long ago. Philippa's clear intellect and power of reasoning absolutely deserted her at this crisis. She had always considered herself governed by the same moral law as other people of mind. Now it never even occurred to her that she had drifted quite away from any governing principle. Her soul was like a rudderless boat, floating at the caprice of the waves.

It is so easy to plan where money is no object. Before she reached home she had arranged it all with a practical attention to detail that had something really curious in it.

After dinner she played a medley of Neapolitan boat songs softly, whilst Arthur lay and listened. He had absolutely no suspicion of his wife. To him she was above it, for he loved her.

Lettice Close was in sharper contrast than ever to Allaronde, with its lights, its flowers, and its luxury.

It was Saturday, and after paying his attendant her wages, Sarel told her, to her astonishment, that he should no longer require her services. He had done so very quietly, and had even added that he had been quite satisfied, but that he was going away, probably the next day, and meant to lock up the house.

Then he went back to the forlorn studio, dimly lighted by one lamp. He stood before his picture, as he had stood so often previously, and this time, to his disordered vision, an awful thing befell.

In the utter silence and loneliness, and with only a dull wind sobbing outside the wet window panes, it seemed that Sister Helen stepped out of the canvas and touched him with her death-cold hand. Like Philippa, and yet so unlike.

He remembered nothing, thought of nothing, only waited with the blood freezing in his veins, to hear a faint, far-away voice come from those pale lips. It came: "A soul that is lost as mine is lost."

"I must be mad," he murmured brokenly, "mad."

"As mine is lost." He could not doubt the evidence of his own senses.

"What have I done?" He spoke to the phantom of his own disordered brain, and it refused to obey him.

Everything was blotted out. Past, future, were

all merged in a hideous present with an overwhelming sense of guilt. He shuddered. The phantom never moved, but stood pointing at him, always repeating those awful words.

No one has ever been able to describe accurately the beginning of madness. It is merciful, for to read of those torments might well unhinge reason itself. Only Shakespeare, perhaps, in "Lear," gave us some faint insight into the shadowy world peopled with ghastly spirits and delusions.

This man had sworn to forget his honor and his duty. Retribution speedy and terrible was to keep him from the broad way of destruction. He would never now go to those lands of summer sunshine. He would never complete the picture that had cost such a price.

"A soul that is lost as mine is lost."

He could bear it no longer. Just for a second, truant memory showed him that other night when "Medea" had stood out pale in the moonlight. Sister Helen should speak no more, torment him no more, haunt him no more.

Again and again he took up a palette knife and approached the picture. The phantom never moved. Again, and yet once more, resolution failed him utterly.

At last he made a final attempt, and in a moment

the patient work of all those many days, the hope of two hearts, was ruined and unrecognizable. Gone the stately figure, gone the glowing flames, the deep, deep eyes.

There was a large glass goblet of water on the table near him. A cool draught might give him strength, might restore his wandering brain, that seemed beyond his control. He seized it, to let it crash down into a hundred fragments a moment later. He could not drink. Nature interposed some strange, terrible barrier between himself and the fulfilment of his craving. Did he guess what fate had befallen him?

A sort of paroxysm succeeded the work of destruction, and when the gray dawn stole in at the windows it lighted the wild eyes of a madman. Kismet had died too late, after all.

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When the church bells were ringing for the early service, and a sunny calm was brooding over North-bent, a terrified postman who had been to Lettice Close brought the news to Harold Buchanan, who, always an early riser, was loitering in his little garden.

He took a sovereign out of his pocket. "I will give you this if you will say nothing to any one of what you have seen, or think you have seen."

The postman, who was naturally taciturn, took the money and promised silence.

Buchanan hastily wrote three or four telegrams. He should want help immediately if it were true.

Ten minutes later he was alone in the presence of a maniac too weak with the frantic struggle of the night to be dangerous at the moment. He was quite calm and fearless. The scientist in him mercifully held the man in check.

He gave the telegrams to a lad who chanced to be passing, and when the church bells were ringing out again two medical friends he could trust were with him.

The two hours he had spent alone held experiences of which he never spoke. But all his life he never lost a hatred of the sound of bells. He knew he was in some danger, but he had plenty of the cool courage that can wait and watch as well as act. We praise the valor of the brave soldier or sailor leading a forlorn hope, but such deeds as these are done every day without fame or reward.

From Adrian's ravings, he knew that he and Philippa were closely bound together by a bond he did not wholly understand. So poor Isabel, to whom he had merely sent a message that her husband was ill, was but at the beginnng of her troubles. Noticing a time-table, he saw there was but one train, early in

the afternoon, by which she could come. Some one must meet her and tell her.

Sitting beside the bed, he wrote to Beryl. He had never written since that first letter, and he did so now very tenderly. The thought of the girl kneeling quietly in the cool, gray church had haunted him. He recalled to her the day he had shot the dog, and asked her to meet Isabel and break the cruel truth as gently as might be. "Tell your father and Betty, if you wish; not the others."

So Beryl told her father, and sped upon her mission pale and trembling. Betty was silent, but dauntless as ever, proud to be trusted.

Mrs. Millington was angry and surprised when her husband told her that he had sent the girls to the station to meet Mrs. Sarel, whose husband was dangerously ill. He did so in that rare tone of authority she dared not gainsay, for he had been roused out of his dreaminess by this sudden horror in their midst, and by Beryl's tears and sweet, sympathetic readiness to accept her hard office.

No one except Mrs. Millington guessed to whom he referred in the afternoon service: "Your prayers are desired for members of this congregation in great trouble."

She was not a bad woman, and she would very gladly have recalled the letter she had written,

though she still justified herself with the old formula of her duty as the wife of the vicar, and by the resolution that she would send some grapes to Lettice Close to-morrow. There is a grim irony in the cheap way some people try to condone their own sins.

Betty left her sister with Isabel, and went home marvelling a little that Beryl, who feared a mouse or a spider, could be so calm and composed. When she got back the service was over, and, much to her surprise, she heard her father call her into the study and close the door.

"You left them together? Was my good little Beryl frightened?" he asked anxiously.

"No, father. Berry can be very brave. She just kissed Mrs. Sarel, and then I left them. I believe if Harold told her to be burnt alive she would go without a word."

"You think she loves him very dearly?" said the vicar almost timidly.

"I know it, father. Berry is the best and truest girl in all the world."

For the first time another thought came to the father who had perhaps cared more for his Greek manuscripts than for his daughters. "You will miss her, Betty, when she goes away."

Betty's eyes glittered, but she fought back the tears that were so rare with her. "It will be dreadful for

me, but she shall never know," she said with resolution. "Father, I can't do it, I know, but I will try, oh, I will, to take her place."

Mr. Millington was deeply touched. Rough Betty he had never understood, and her utter unlikeness to her mother had made her almost unattractive to him; but he saw that here too a loving womanly heart was beating.

He bent over and kissed her warmly. "I am very glad I am to have another right hand."

The keen, honest gray eyes that were Betty's one beauty brightened. "I shall try so hard, father. And there is something else. I am teaching myself Greek, and I can write it a little—only a little. If you would help me sometimes."

The vicar fetched a shabby Greek Testament without a word. "My dear, I will give you a lesson now. We want something to occupy our thoughts."

So it came to pass that the eager teacher and learner forgot all the sorrow and suffering so pathetically near as they forged the first links in a chain that bound them very closely in the after years.

Beryl slipped upstairs when she at last returned, and flung herself down upon her bed. She thought she could never forget the white, set face and tearless eyes of Isabel Sarel when she had heard the whole story, and known the end of all her hopes and fears.

CHAPTER XVII.

DARKNESS AND DAWN.

PHILIPPA had made every preparation for her flight, and she had kissed her husband before he went to bed, not quite without a spark of pity or remorse. She waited for Adrian in the north drawing-room, peopled as it was with her associations with him, with an eagerness that made the minutes drag.

Everything favored her. It was a wild, dark night. The trees bent and wailed in the high autumnal wind as if they knew and dreaded the coming of the inevitable winter. He was to come at midnight, and to open the French window and slip out into the wood could not but be easy. Once there, they would go to the station, catch the last train to London, and sail for Naples next day.

She had no compunction, no doubt, no fear save that faint, unacknowledged question whether Adrian would ever love her as she loved him. She looked back on her past with self-pity. It was cold and dead indeed, compared with this passionate present.

What should she lose that would weigh in the scale with her gain?

She remembered, and smiled to remember, that once before a fear of what that world might say had actually restrained her from action. She had not loved then. She had had no idea how that one fact could revolutionize. She had read and thought of love so incessantly that her heart only needed the merest touch to be on fire.

She had changed her evening silks for a thick black dress; a fur-lined cloak, hat, and veil lying beside her in readiness. A dozen times she went to the window in fancied answer to the signal, to find it was only the long arms of the roses tapping and beckoning. The leaves, already blown down in thousands by the tempestuous gale, rustled crisply along the dry, hard paths.

The air was full of sound, and every sound a mystery and a question. The holy silence of a peaceful night was altogether absent. It was weather for a witches' Sabbath. It excited Philippa. She liked the high, warm wind, and thought how soon it would be cooling her flushed cheeks.

She had never been more queenly or more beautiful than now, stripped of every ornament, every diamond, that Arthur had given her. Stay, though, she had forgotten those that twinkled in her ears.

She took them out and threw them aside contemptuously. They mattered nothing to her. Nothing mattered any more except love and art.

She told herself repeatedly that she was obeying a very noble impulse. Adrian Sarel was a great artist, a genius, and was he to be cramped for the sake of a few miserable conventionalities? He must learn to love her utterly. She had flung herself and her fortune at his feet. Isabel? She smiled at the mirror which echoed her own triumphant assurance.

Twelve rich, musical strokes sounded from the clock tower. She had liked to invest the flight with every possible circumstance of romance, although she would have been ashamed enough to own such a weakness. He was late. He should have been waiting, watching, expectant. She counted the very seconds until five, ten, fifteen minutes had passed, very wearily, very impatiently. Supposing they missed the train? Her cheeks burnt, and again she listened attentively.

Yes, there were light footsteps at last; there was no doubt of it. Her courage and her reckless joy came back, and she threw the wide windows open with a little, soft, glad exclamation.

Then she stood still, petrified with a surprise that in one moment grew to terror. It was Isabel, not Adrian Sarel, who stood before her, white and wide-

eyed and wet with the rain. Her hat had slipped back, and hung upon her shoulders. A crimson shawl, huddled round them, only accentuated her deathly pallor.

There was a silence between them, and then Philippa spoke in a voice that did not sound like her own, weighted with a vague foreboding that something terrible had brought her into the presence of the woman she had wronged.

"You, Mrs. Sarel?"

They seemed to have changed places, for when Isabel answered her there was no fear, no hesitation in the clear, firm voice. The shawl slipped down, and revealed her slight figure in its shabby dress. She had a new dignity, the dignity of conscious right in the presence of shame.

"I know all," she began quietly, as Philippa's eyes fell before her. "You expected Adrian to-night. *You* meant to leave your husband; *he*, me and his little, helpless children. I have not come to reproach you, but to tell you that he will never come and that you can never go."

"Then he—is—dead?" hissed out Philippa, overmastered by her dread.

Still quite calmly, quite firmly, Isabel went on.
"It is far worse. He is mad."

"It is not true."

"Not true?" cried Isabel brokenly. "Not true? I tell you that Adrian Sarel, my husband and your lover, is lying at death's door, a maniac. A dog bit him—your own dog—and he is mad. O God, that he were in his grave! They tell me he will die soon, but he raves of Philippa, Philippa, until I could not bear to hear the name. I have learnt to hate. He has been talking of you, and of a new life in Naples, and of the picture, always the picture. He might, perhaps, be calmer for a moment if he saw you beside him. I have come here to fetch you, as he could not come himself."

Philippa shrank from her, trembling in every limb. "I cannot. I dare not," she murmured, hiding her terror-stricken face in her hands.

"You *dare* not?"

The scorn in Isabel's voice stung the proud woman beside her unendurably. Yet no humiliation equalled the physical cowardice that made the thought of seeing Adrian a nightmare. She remembered the little scar she had noticed upon his wrist. It all flitted across her brain in a few seconds.

She was powerless to retort. No falsehood even seemed possible with these stern blue eyes fixed upon her. She could not string together any kind of denial. There are times when the most accomplished liar is silenced in the presence of truth.

An hour ago she had been jubilant with triumphant anticipation. Now she was conscious of no sentiment but a craven fear. Not even regret; that would come afterward, when the first hideous impression was no longer paramount.

"I cannot," she reiterated, "I cannot. How can you bear to witness such horrors, to be with him when—" She stopped short.

All the scorn had vanished when Isabel answered, with a conviction there was no gainsaying, a calm despair that was well-nigh sublime, "Because I am his wife. He does not love me any more, but I am his wife, the mother of his children. That tie cannot be broken. God joined us. Any other union would snap asunder in an instant in such a moment as this. What does your love do for you? It teaches you to break my heart, to ruin my home; but when the shadow of death falls, then it is his wife who alone can dare to face it with him. God gives me strength to drink even this cup. I knew, I knew for weeks past, that he was being drawn away from me, and I prayed so that he might not leave me desolate and that he might not sin. My prayer is answered. He will not leave me till he is dead. He is given back to me at this last dreadful hour, and though he does not know me, does not love me, he is still my husband. I would die a thousand deaths to give

him a little ease. I think my coming to you proves that."

"I cannot, I cannot come. I cannot even ask you to forgive me; I have no right," murmured Philippa. "But there is one word I must say. I tempted him, and, before God, I believe it was more for his art's sake than for mine he yielded. I knew even to-night that I had not won his heart. I thought I might win it, but it was never mine. Ah, it costs me anguish to make the confession, and yet you force me to it. You love him. Pity me a little because I loved him also. I was all on fire. I could not leave him to you. I thought you did not greatly care."

"You thought I did not care? Adrian, Adrian, my one lover, my husband, what could I have done for you that I did not do? I was unworthy of you—only a poor, ignorant girl—but I did my best, and he will never know."

The agony of that cry rang in Philippa's ears a thousand times in after life.

Then, suddenly, a light came into Isabel's eyes. The mere idea that, after all, he had not deserted her quite without a struggle brought a warm ray of comfort. She was lifted up to a height altogether above the common plane. She was clinging too desperately to hesitate to the Cross that shone as the only beacon in her darkness. She held out her hand. This

weeping, despairing, fearful woman was no longer the Philippa she had dreaded and hated.

"I must go back," she said, "and if he is conscious again, I must tell him you cannot come."

"If he is conscious, it is to you he will turn. It was in his madness he yielded to me," said Philippa brokenly. "I am not fit to take your hand. I have sinned too blackly against you and yours. There can be no pardon."

"God will forgive you, as I do, freely, willingly. We have not been happy, but at least my husband loved me once, as your husband loves you now. Oh, go back to him. It is not yet too late. Be thankful for the safe shelter of your home and his love. You may retrieve your past. You may yet be at peace. He need never know. You have your work left to do, and I my little children to live for. No one is ever utterly bereaved. God is too good."

"You can say that still? Can your religion work such miracles? You can forgive me, you can be resigned, even calm."

"All things are possible with God."

Philippa sank back upon the sofa, shaken by a storm of wild weeping.

"I must not stay. He may need me. Pray for us; pray for me. And, remember, I forgive you."

Isabel went out, leaving Philippa stunned. All

her life lay shattered before her like a broken glass. Isabel's forgiveness had laid low her pride, but those who all their years have thrust religion aside as forming no part in the scheme of things cannot in a moment find any comfort there.

She went to her room. There, upon the dressing-table, lay the sealed letter for her husband. She glanced round at this room she had thought never to see again. Adrian mad, dying? It could not be. Such a little while since she had laid down that letter; such a great gulf opening now at her very feet. It was horrible, horrible, to be alone with only ghastly visions of the man she had loved to keep her awful company.

She seized the letter and burnt it in the flickering candle. It would no more be needed. That dream-life in a land of sunshine and roses was never to be. She sat down white and shivering with fear. Oh for some warm, friendly hand to clasp her own, for some tender voice to comfort her.

Isabel had rent the veil. She saw now what sin meant. There was one stern text that came to her pale lips—"The wages of sin is death." She dared not face Adrian with the fire of madness in his eyes. Could she dare to pass into the other world that all at once became a reality?

Sudden conversions do not happen with souls like

Philippa's. She could not in a moment catch the reflex of the faith that upheld Isabel, the exaltation that changed the simple, quiet girl to a heroine. The first hard step in the path of right she had indeed taken. She had confessed the truth. But that confession brought no alleviation.

Something of the real nature of the sin she had committed, the sin from which she had been saved, overcame her with a shuddering sense of guilt.

For the first time, stripped of all shams, she looked into her heart.

The cold, pale dawn found her still keeping vigil. For hours she was verily in the place of torment. Shifting pictures haunted her of what might be happening, what must be before long; of that dreadful visitant who had all abruptly claimed her place and her lover. Would death come without any moment of consciousness or instant of preparation? The miserable woman who dared not, could not, pray for herself, sank on her knees trembling. "If there be indeed any to hear, let him know his wife once again."

If God only heard the prayers of the saints, there would be few enough answered. Philippa, groping blindly in the gloom, was not altogether lost. By-and-by she slept from sheer exhaustion, but her prayer had been answered.

As the day broke gray and stormy, Isabel knelt by the bedside of her husband, but though there was a momentary interval of consciousness Buchanan dared not leave her alone with Adrian.

"You must not ask that," he said with compassionate firmness, though he motioned the other doctor who had been summoned to the other room.

It made her realize that the horror of it all was not a fearful dream. That such a sacred parting should perforce be shared by another gave it an added pang.

Buchanan never forgot the wonderful expression of her face. He, who denied the existence of angels, mentally likened her to one of those ministering spirits in her purity and her grief.

Adrian knew her, and there was gladness in the recognition that for a brief period extinguished the madness in his eyes.

"Adrian, I have been to Philippa. She cannot come to you."

The clear, musical voice, so familiar in its low sweetness, helped to bring back a gleam of memory, or perhaps only the actual present had reality for him.

"My dear wife, I only want you. It is heaven where you are."

"Not where I am, but where you will be soon. God is very merciful. He did not let you sin. Can

you not say one prayer, only one word, to let me know that even now you can think of Him?"

The lovely, calm face of the Madonna that had comforted Isabel before looked down as if in pity on the man who was dying with so little that was noble to leave as a remembrance. His eyes sought the picture again and again, but he could not speak.

And Isabel prayed aloud, with a fervor, a despair, as if she would fain force open the very doors of heaven for the man she had so loved. The valley of death was shadowy here, and dim with the horror and pain of the most hideous of all diseases that sever body and spirit.

She had no fear. The frail girl who had shrunk from the water where her child struggled was lost in the brave woman, ready to bear her husband company as far on his last terrible journey as was possible. The fervent prayer of the righteous avails so much. Who shall dare to say what it may have done to blot out the remembrance of many shortcomings in the divine eyes that are so far more merciful than our own?

There were no tears for Isabel. She gazed upon her dying husband as if she were loth to lose sight of him for even a second of these precious minutes when he was all hers. The time was very short.

Fearing another paroxysm, Buchanan gently took

her hand. "You must leave him now, Mrs. Sarel, for a little while."

"A little while? For ever—on this earth."

She flung her arm around Adrian's neck and kissed him passionately. "Mine now, and mine in heaven, where we shall meet."

She saw he knew her no more, and sank back into a merciful unconsciousness.

"It is all over. He is in peace at last." It seemed to her as if but a moment had elapsed when these words fell upon her ears.

But they were not spoken by Buchanan. He had known the end was likely to come in the early morning, and had asked Beryl to be at Lettice Close as early as was possible. She had slipped out at five o'clock, proud that her lover should have confidence in her courage. She had no fear where he was.

Buchanan met her at the door. "He is dead," he said quietly, as he kissed her. "After such a night as this, to see you brings one back to life again. I am asking a hard service of you, little one—to go to that poor woman; but she is so desolate, and when she rouses we must tell her."

"I can feel for her now that we love each other."

Not the first shy avowal was half as sweet as that tender implication that as the dead man had been to Isabel, so was he to her. There was nothing incon-

gracious in this little, unwitnessed love scene. The sweetest thing in life is that such flowers blossom along its path so unexpectedly, so richly. Love and sorrow are twins, after all, and never far apart.

So it came to pass that it was Beryl who clung weeping to Isabel with such a tender compassion that the merciful tears soon came to her relief. Beryl had not many words. She did not try to console where consolation was impossible. She could only feel with her. It was enough.

ENVOI.

And so the tale is told. To Philippa, to Isabel, it seemed as if life must end for them as it had ended for Adrian on that wild night of despair.

But time is very kind, and something so like happiness that it was more than content came back to the wife of the artist who had failed. Living quietly at Eastbourne, devoting her days to her children, she can think with calmness of the stormy past. Her beauty came back to her, with a new dignity, and there were those who would have loved her if they had not seen that all her heart was centred in Adrian's little son and daughter.

Once, long after, she met Philippa standing musing beside the grave of him they had both loved.

She learnt then that she had not altogether failed to touch that proud spirit.

Arthur Farrant never knew. If he guessed, he made no sign, and sometimes he almost fancies his wife is learning to care for him.

Sweet Beryl is a happy mother, with a wonderful baby Alice very dear to her grandfather, who likes to slip away to her breezy home on the Yorkshire moors with his devoted companion, Betty. For Betty kept her word, and took her sister's place.

Mrs. Millington is more boastful than ever since Betty's first novel ran the gauntlet of the reviews with flying colors, though she had thrown buckets of cold water on its publication, and prophesied dire disasters. Her second step-daughter keeps her in check, and, so far, all her efforts to find a husband for the rising authoress are a failure.

Betty is very happy in her career, and very fortunate, though Harold Buchanan complains he is quite tired of playing *jeune premier* in her dramas.

"You and Beryl taught me how people made love, so I don't need to learn for myself," she says saucily, and the rest of the family echo her opinion thankfully.

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